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The Location of the Southern Combed Yarn Spinning Industry is shown on this map.  
Drawn by Mildred Barnwell



## **FACES WE SEE**





# FACES WE SEE

*by*

Mildred Gwin Barnwell

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*Published by*

THE SOUTHERN COMBED YARN SPINNERS ASSOCIATION  
GASTONIA, N.C. • MCMXXXIX

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by Mildred Gwin Barnwell

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***Photographs by Bill Baker***

North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development

## FOREWORD

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None of the photographs in this book was posed. All the negatives are on file with the News Bureau, North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, Raleigh, North Carolina, and copies may be had upon request according to index number.

The facts in this book were taken from actual mill records; from "Gaston County, Past--Present--Future" by Joseph H. Separk; files of the Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association; and, most important of all, from innumerable conversations with the few pioneers, still living, to whose vision and foresight and courage the southern textile industry owes its existence.

To them and to all the members of the Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association who opened their doors and their office records and assisted in so many ways in collecting the material used in this book, we express our gratitude.

We are especially indebted to Douglas G. Woolf who, in an editorial capacity, has given unsparingly of his time and care advising in the preparation of this material.

M.G.B.

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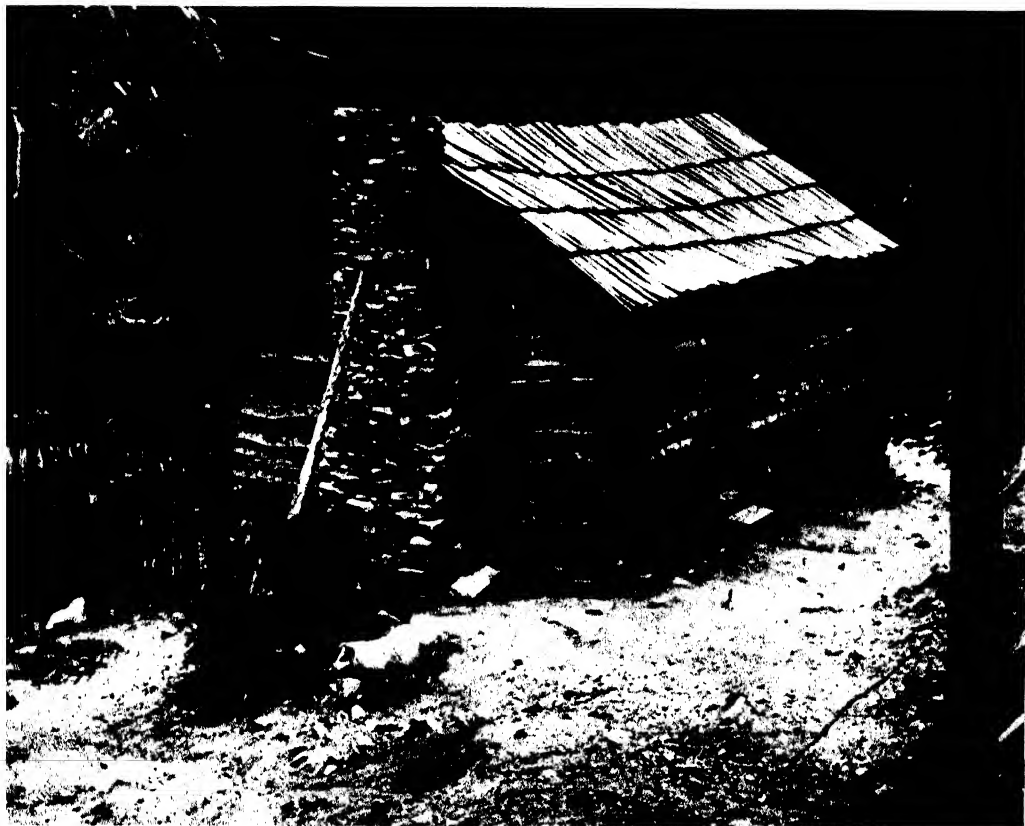
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Out of the rural districts, their poverty and squalor, they came by the hundreds . . .



. . . To live in the cottages of the cotton mill villages . . .

(Actual photograph taken nearly thirty years ago showing model housing conditions in highest type mill village of that period.)





*Chapter One*

**“SOUTHERN MILL FOLKS”**

---

The stranger whose car bore an out of state license tag drove into a Carolina filling station and as the attendant wiped the windshield and filled his gas-tank he passed around a few questions:

“What do all these mills make, buddy? Never saw as many strung along one highway in all my life. Been passing 'em ever since we left Greensboro. What town is this? Well, I've heard of Gastonia and I've heard of mill towns, but this section of the country's got me panting.

*“What do you folks do here beside work in cotton mills?”*

And to the last query the attendant wearily answered, “Same as folks anywhere else. Baseball, fishin', a little frolickin' now and then. Your oil's O.K. That'll be \$2.10, sir, for ten gallons of gas. Follow No. 29 . . . it'll take you right into Spartanburg.”

The car pulled out of the station and nosed Southward. The overalled attendant pumped the gas tank full again.

“Beats anything the way people seem to think cotton mill folks ain't like everybody else. Guess they think we live in log cabins like backwoods mountaineers.” He spoke disdainfully. The man's loyalty to the cotton mill community in which he lived and to the mills which had brought his own people out of the backwoods he so scorned had been offended by the stranger's manner. He was still talking as he stepped up to service my car.

"I sure do wish somebody'd write a book about mill folks and what they do beside work. It gets mighty tiresome having to explain to tourists that we are just like other folks. . . . Better off than some, I guess. You see," he confided, "I work in a mill myself. I'm on the second shift. But I help my old man over here at the station so he can get a little rest. He's gettin' sorta old. He used to work in the mill too, till he saved up enough to buy his own business. Me and my folks, we've always been mill workers, that is ever since we came down."

"Why don't you write the story?" I asked. "You know what the tourist should be told."

"No'm, I ain't a writer, but I sure could tell 'em lots. My boy, now he might write things someday. He's graduatin' from High School this year . . . but I never had any schoolin'."

I called for a Coca-Cola, wiped the mouth of the bottle with my handkerchief and continued the conversation, the water from the ice-box dripping from the bottle and spotting my blouse front. I was a steady customer at the filling station; my questions did not offend.

"Your folks came from the mountains, didn't they?"

Yes--they had come from the mountains, thirty-odd years before. The labor agent had persuaded them. Labor agents? Then I remembered. Early in the 1900s when the first combers were installed in our cotton mills and Gaston County went in for a highly specialized quality product, mills were built so fast there was not enough help to go round. Mill men had become frantic over the labor shortage. Fully one-fourth of the county's population was on the road moving from one job to another newer one . . . for each mill man was trying to outdo the other in offering alluring inducements to mill workers as he sought to entice his neighbor's help to his own plant. This was a shootin' offense. Feuds sprang up. And the labor war finally culminated in the killing of one mill owner by another with a double-barreled shotgun.

Shocked and sobered by the tragedy, mill owners declared a truce and formed an Association, agreed not to steal each other's help, and decided to import labor. Agents were sent to Western North Carolina mountains, over into East Tennessee, up into the highlands of Virginia. . . . That was back in 1907.

"I was just a young-un when the agent came to see us," said the man. "I didn't know what it was all about, but there wuz a lot of fast words goin' around. Ma, she didn't want to come. Pa, he did. The agent let on that Pa could make fifteen dollars every month, workin' in the mill . . . and Pa went to the little chimney-cubby and took out six silver dollars and shook 'em in his hand. I never will forget it. He said he was savin' a dollar every year where he was, but money was mighty hard to 'cumulate. Ma kept on sayin' she wouldn't come . . . she'd stay up there and sell berries and galax to the summer people . . . she'd not work in a cotton mill.

"Well, the upshot was that Pa went to work and packed all our clothes and quilts in a big hogshead that had a stick run through the middle of it, stickin' out through each end of the barrel head. We didn't have a wagon, but we didn't have any furniture 'cept wood blocks, neither . . . and this contraption'd roll along. When Ma saw he meant it, she quit her poutin' and we all started walkin', Pa hitched to the barrel with grapevine harness. We walked every step of the way from Yancey, too, Pa pullin' the barrel sometimes and holdin' 'er back another. Didn't mess up a thing, neither, cept it wore his silver dollars plum slick!"

This little family, rolling its own, had passed or caught up with hundreds of others for the labor agent had thoroughly canvassed the mountains, and the Southern Highlanders, purest strain of Anglo-Saxon blood, many still speaking pure Elizabethan English, were leaving their coves and valleys, heading for the lowlands, the cotton mills and cash money! Fifteen dollars a month! And a house to live in! Some folks said the houses were painted . . . not log houses with cracks for the wind to whip through!

Hundreds of mountain folks, swapping their laurel and rhododendron, for the wukkin' and quittin' whistle.

I had drained my Coca-Cola bottle now, but the man was looking back thirty years, and one can't stop reminiscences off short. "Of course, we were luckier than most," he continued. "Pa had his six dollars so he could look around and find out the best people to work for. Lots of folks, though, had to move right in to the first mill houses they came to. Pa's brother Jake was one . . . others, too. And lots of 'em found out that there big wage was just the'ry, not cash money a'tall.

"Pa says folks worked in some mills for years and never saw a dollar. They were paid off in script, and they had to spend that at the comp'ny store. Course, only the sorriest folks kept on workin' for script . . . folks with any gumption a'tall would leave and go to a mill that paid off in cash. Finally—got so script mills couldn't get enough decent labor to run. They tell me, what yarn they made was so poor it wouldn't sell.

"Yas'm. S'pose you back up now and get to the air gauge."

When poor yarn, made by inefficient labor, was rejected and the mills' earning power was threatened, a reform movement swept the country. All the mills then adopted cash pay rolls, and by 1910 the company store and script were things of the past and southern combed yarn was attaining higher quality ratings in the trade.

The effect of a universal cash pay roll system had also an immediate effect upon the characters of the mill workers who had struggled to make script and appetite balance at the mill store. Cash in the pay-envelope! Now, this was what they had come to town for! Something to spend . . . silver to finger and fondle as one decided whether it would be spareribs or fat-back or just plain stew beef. Something to lay by for the circus or for Chris'mus, or for an independent future . . . as one sought out and found the best bargains in the town stores. Why, the very filling station in which I drank my "dope" . . . bought my gas . . . was a result of the cash pay roll and one mill worker's ambition and thrift.

My thoughts were jerked back to the service-man. "Your tires are all right . . . thirty pounds around." He was no longer brooding, the tone of pride had again crept into his voice. "Yas'm, my folks'll always be mill workers. Me, I started doffin' when I was twelve. We didn't come down 'til after the labor law was passed."

"The first child labor law was passed the year I was born," I said, "but I've heard that children six and seven years old worked in the mills, sometimes, and got paid 10c a day and a day was from sun-up to sun-down."

"Oh, I've heard lots of old folks say that's what they made when they were young-uns. I got 40c a day when I doffed." He was proud of the comparison. "'Course, that was after I learned . . . and I had to work from light to night, but up in the mountains we grubbed in the field soon's we were able to walk, and we worked from can-see to can't-see."

"Well, times have changed . . . and child labor is gone forever. Now a child under 16 can't even take a sight-seeing tour through a cotton mill. Don't let the tourists get you down," I cautioned, as I handed him my empty, took my change and stepped on the starter.

I drove out of the station and down Franklin Avenue, through a nest of mills and villages. For the first time I was seeing them, for now I was looking at them through a mill worker's eyes. Eyes which could compare mill life of thirty years ago with the poverty and privation of a mountain farm, and mill life of thirty years ago with mill life of today.

So his Ma had not wanted to come . . . the poverty and squalor she had been forced to leave flashed up before me. I'd seen those mountain hovels. Ten to one she had an electric refrigerator now, and sniffed when she thought of her highland cousin Jenny who still had to tote water from the crick, half a mile down the gulch!

I circled back around the town. One mill village blended with another, edging the city, just outside the corporate limits. The pattern was always the same: modern, neat houses, a church or two, brick schoolhouses (80% of the school children in this section of the state are from mill employee

families), a movie theatre, the brilliant front of a national chain store, and in the center or slightly off-side, the mill throbbing and humming with the sustenance it gave to lives dependent upon it for critter comforts and up-town luxuries.

Vital statistics, often parroted, carried a new meaning now. I knew these mills paid a minimum wage of \$12 to \$15 a week for forty hours of work. I knew the total pay roll of the Southern combed yarn mills was fifteen and a half million dollars annually for twenty-seven thousand employees. I knew those neat, well-roofed cottages rented to employees for an average of twenty-five cents per room per week, or only a dollar and a half per week for a six room house.

Some of the houses had flowers, some vegetable plots. Power lines running to the side of the cottages meant lights, electric stoves, electric irons, refrigeration, washing machines, all the utility conveniences, for electric current was furnished to mill houses free up to 44 kilowatts, and a small charge for all above that.

Plumbing vents sticking out of the roofs meant modern bathrooms, for water and sewage facilities were furnished free of charge.

Inside the mill a bell rang sharply, the big outside door swung open. It was three o'clock; the first shift was over and out poured the textile workers. These strong, normal-looking people were only one or—at the most—two generations removed from mountain poverty, picturesque but pellagra-ridden.

The men in their overalls, wisps of cotton still clinging to them, walked with a firm step, heads up. There was no evidence of work-weariness as they strode along discussing the day's baseball news.

"The Cardinals 're in their stride now . . ."

"Yep—game's in the bag, sure."

"See yer at the stadium tonight, gotter get my tomato plants in this evening."

They hurried their separate ways.

Women, their gingham work frocks mussed from a day in the spinning room but with no sign of shabbiness in their dress, hastened toward home or town. Not since 1931\* have women worked in textile mills at night, but skilled women with quick fingers are in demand during the day. Mothers whose children are in school work on the first shift, getting home before school is dismissed to "red up" the house, prepare a hot supper for the family. One can spot these mothers: quiet-mannered women, settled in their hips, strong, kindly faces. These are typical American housewives.

A group of younger women pass, a fuzz of cotton lint showing on dark hair.

"I'm going to the beauty parlor today, got 'n appointment. 'S'always so crowded the day of the square-dance."

"Jack's coming down from Salisbury for it. I bought the *cute*st dress up town . . . flower-print."

"Well, I'll be seein' yer. Got to take my kid sister to the dentist at four and then go to choir practice. We're getting ready for the Easter service."

They dodge a big truck as they cross the street, and hurry on.

A director of community activities recognized my car and stopped. "Hope you'll come out to our gym tonight. Our basketball team won the spinners' league trophy and we're having a little celebration and presentation ceremony."

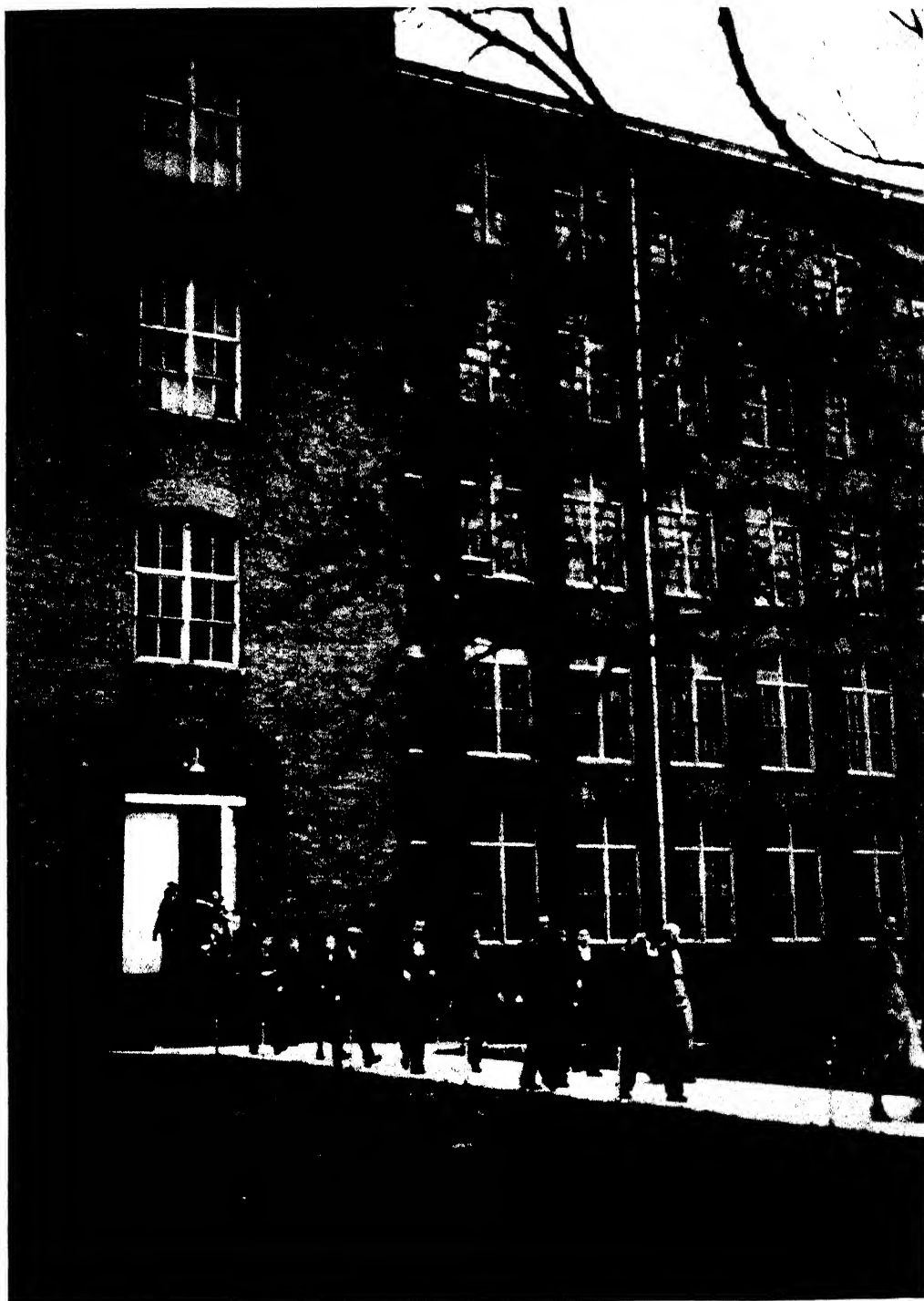
What do cotton mill people do beside work in cotton mills . . . or more specifically, what do mill people who work in combed yarn mills do outside of working hours? One doesn't have to make an exhaustive social study to find out . . . all one has to do is turn off the main highway, anywhere in the Piedmont section of the Carolinas, ride through an average mill village, park one's car, and listen to snatches of the passing conversation. Then it is easy enough to believe that steady employment, good wages, ample leisure

\* Voluntary agreement—see Chapter 4 re Legislation.

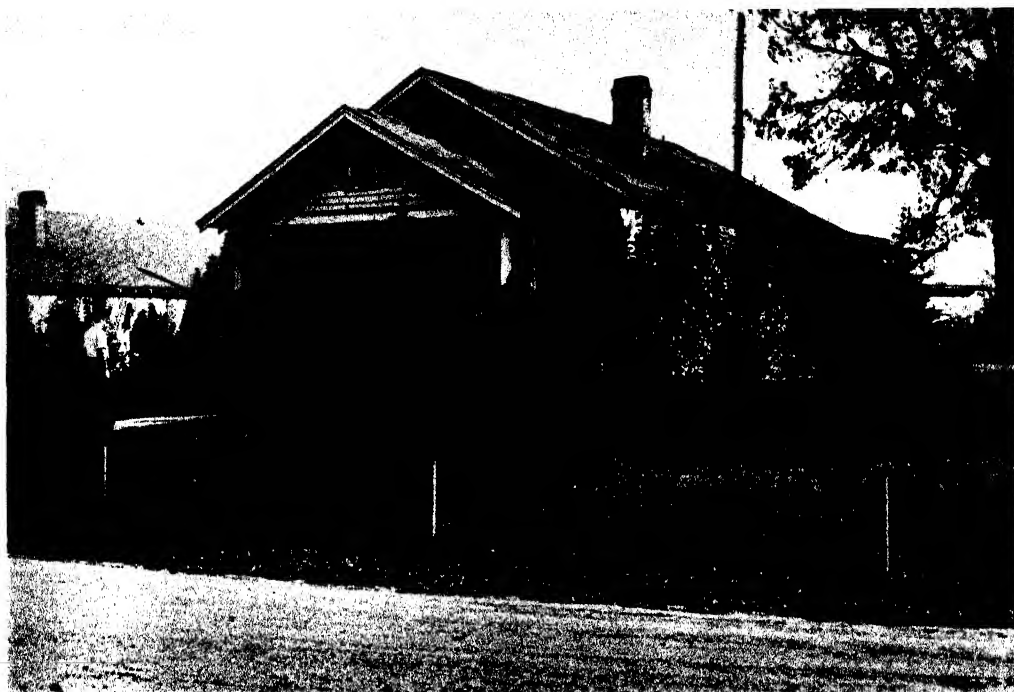
time, pleasant community life have made of cotton mill workers a people of integrity and character who lead simple, normal American lives, who wonder what part of the South folks are talking about when it's called Economic Problem No. 1.

Seeing is believing, you know—and the camera doesn't lie. The filling station attendant who wished "somebody'd write a book about mill folks and what they do beside work" threw me a challenge I couldn't duck. Only I don't have to *write* a book. All I have to do is to let the camera talk. The pictures that follow, unposed and untouched, tell the story that the filling station man wished to be told.





It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Their shift is over. What does a southern textile worker do beside work in cotton mills?



Some go home to village houses like these. Such houses may be rented by the textile worker at a rate of 25¢ per room per week. Water and sewage facilities are free; electric current is furnished at a minimum rate.



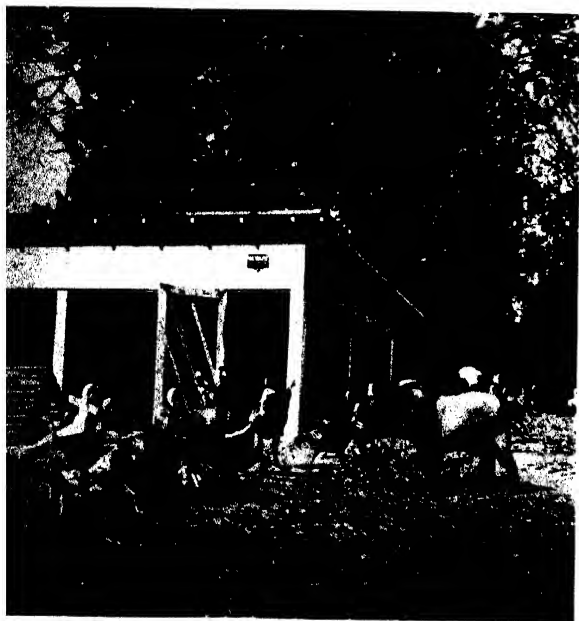
This lovely home in a mill village is rented by a mill superintendent from the company for \$30.00 a month, water free of charge. It has 8 rooms and a breakfast nook; all other modern conveniences plus a garage. The house, incidentally, cost the mill \$7,000.00 in 1933!



Some combed yarn mill employees are purchasing homes through Building and Loan Associations. On the above, \$95.00—extended over a ten week period—constituted the first payment. Additional payments are \$2.73 per week for ten years. The total amount involved in the purchase price was \$995.00 which includes taxes, insurance and interest during amortization period.



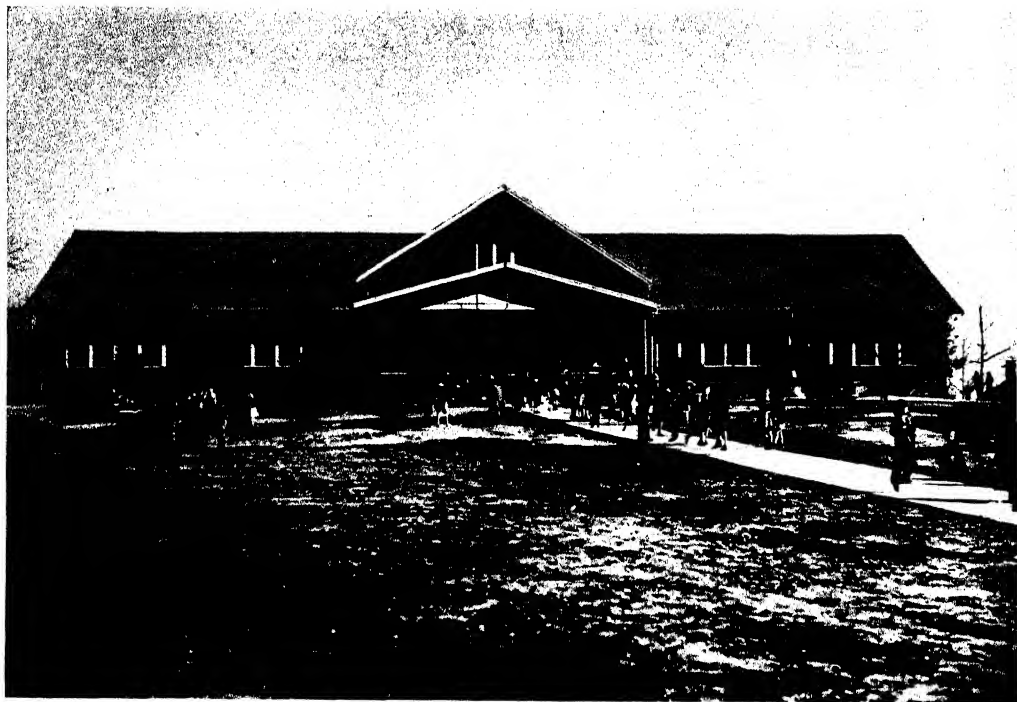
When work is done it is pleasant to go home to neat houses shaded by great oak trees . . .  
A street in a combed yarn mill village.



Some southern textile employees own their little farms and commute to the mill in their own automobiles . . . Raising turkeys, for instance, is a lucrative hobby.



No matter the status in life, one always has home chores to do. It's wash-day, in the shade of the china-berry tree.

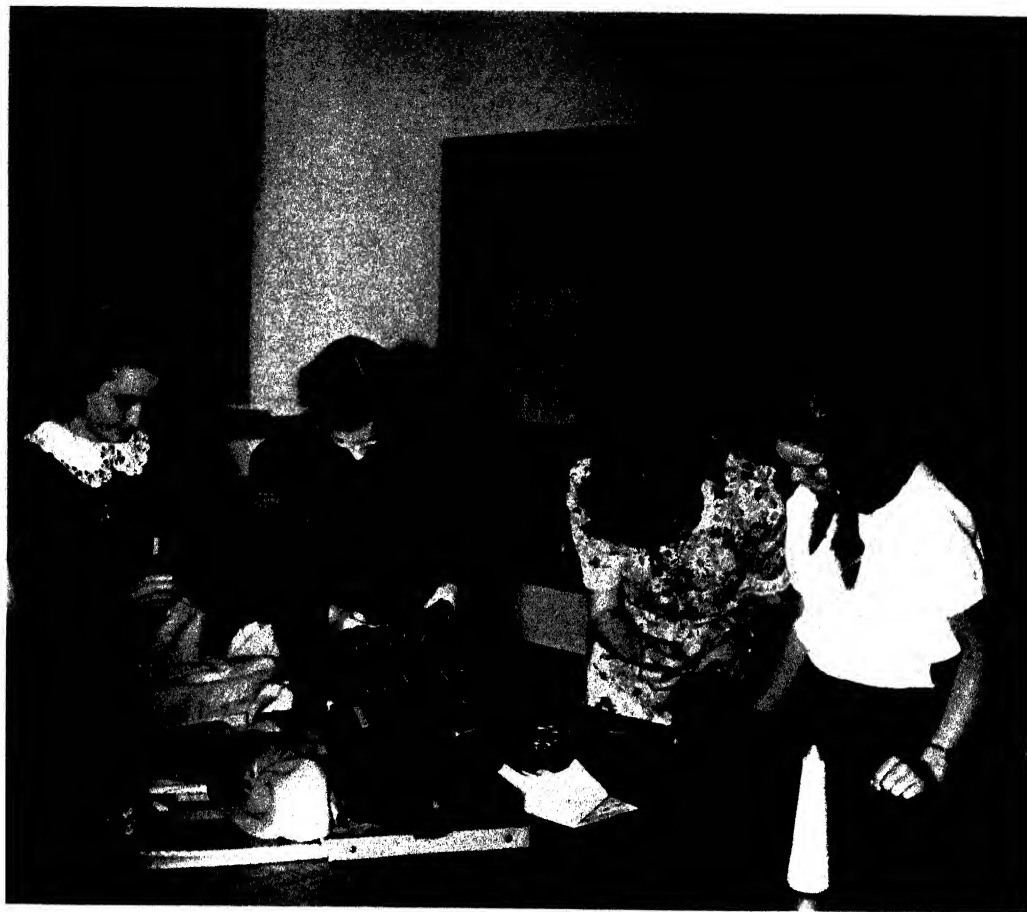


Under the compulsory education laws of N. C. which require schooling until a child is 14, and the child labor laws which do not allow children under 16 to work, the younger generation of textile mill employee families are given educational advantages denied their mothers and fathers. This recess scene in a typical combed yarn mill grammar-grade school tells its own story. There are 16,879 white children in school in Gaston County, over 80% being from mill employee families!





"This drinking-fountain water sure does taste good!"



When the State was no longer able to include the Home Economics and Manual Training classes in the public school budget, one mill executive in the combed yarn group decided he would pay for these departments at the school in his mill village rather than deprive the children of his employees of development along these lines.

Here we see children of the mill operatives as well as the vice-president's daughter learning to sew. . . .



. . . while boys in the same school are studying the fundamentals of mechanical engineering.



At a community house library, established for employees of one mill, young and old enjoy the books and picture magazines. Cotton mill employees are constant patrons of public libraries, too. For instance, the Gaston County Public Library reports that through its Bookmobile service 7,100 volumes were circulated at one mill village library station during the past year.





And after school on rainy afternoons, children gather at this Community House to hear the Director-of-Activities read a thrilling fairy story!

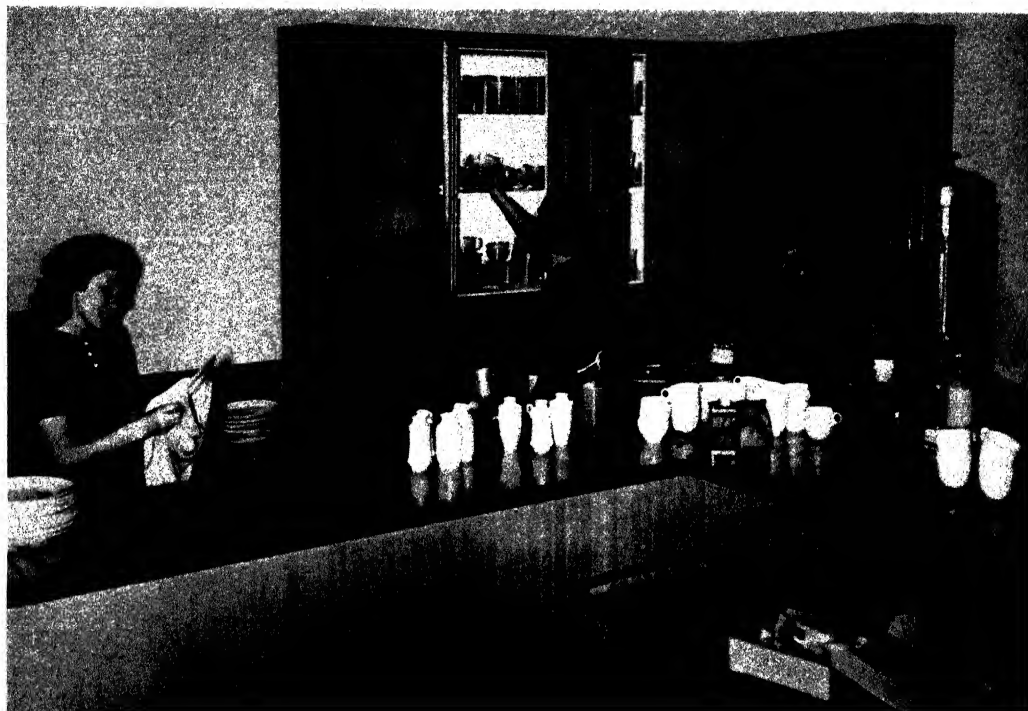


"My mama's gonna take us to the picture show when we get cleaned up.



*"Mama's li'l baby loves strawberry jam,  
strawberry jam."*

And mama doesn't mind because it is no back-breaking effort to bathe a child in this specially built tub, the correct height from the floor for a mother to do a clean-up job in greatest comfort. A feature in a mill community house.



Big night tonight! A banquet is being prepared for 75 guests . . . The kitchen in a combed yarn mill community house.





A gold-star mother of one of the mill villages.

"My boy died in service during the World War but I always fix up a bowl of flowers on his birthday."

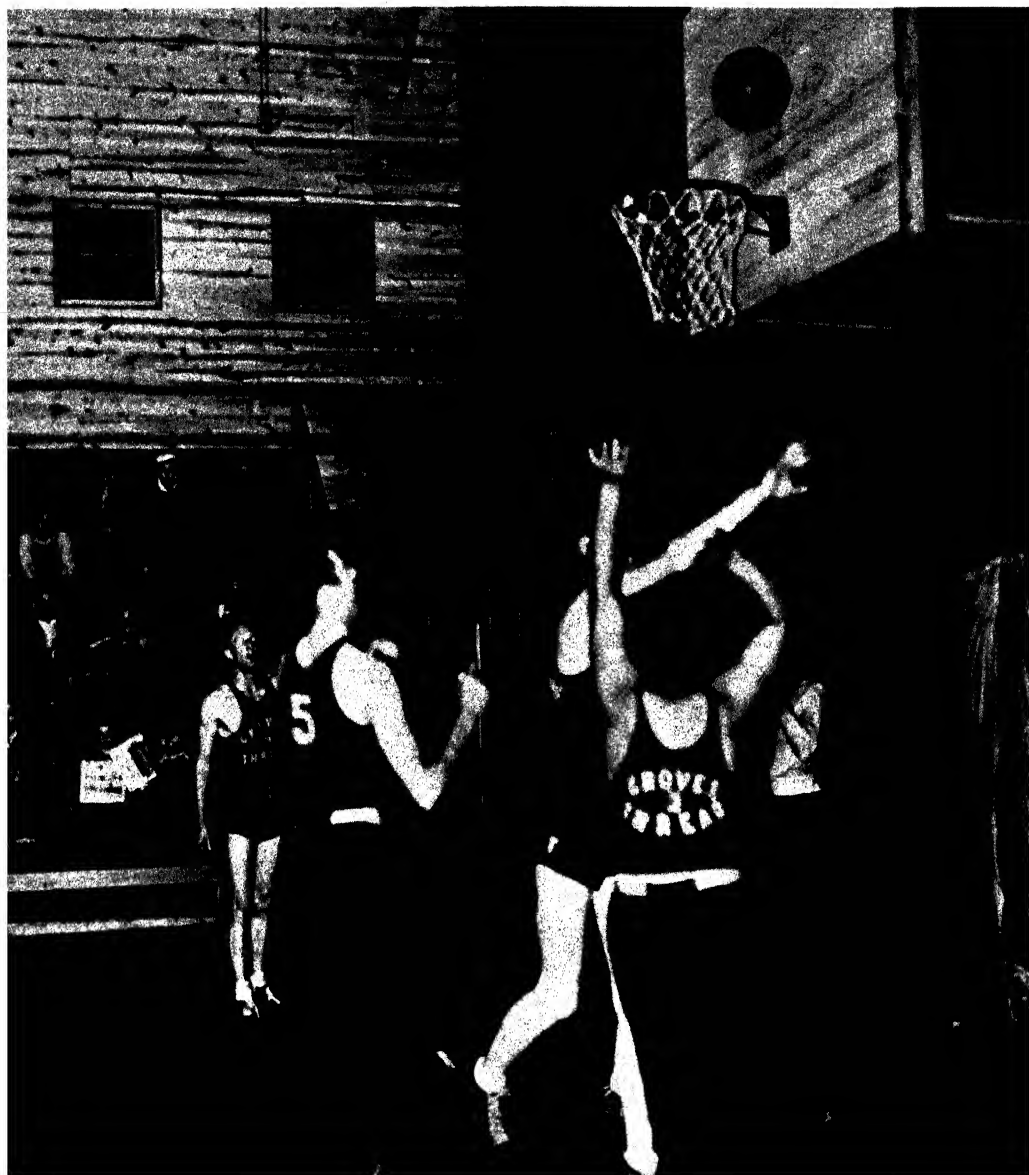


Football . . . a major sport in any section. Belmont, N. C.'s team in action, five members of which work on the morning shift in the combed yarn mills, attend afternoon school sessions and are starred on the football squad.

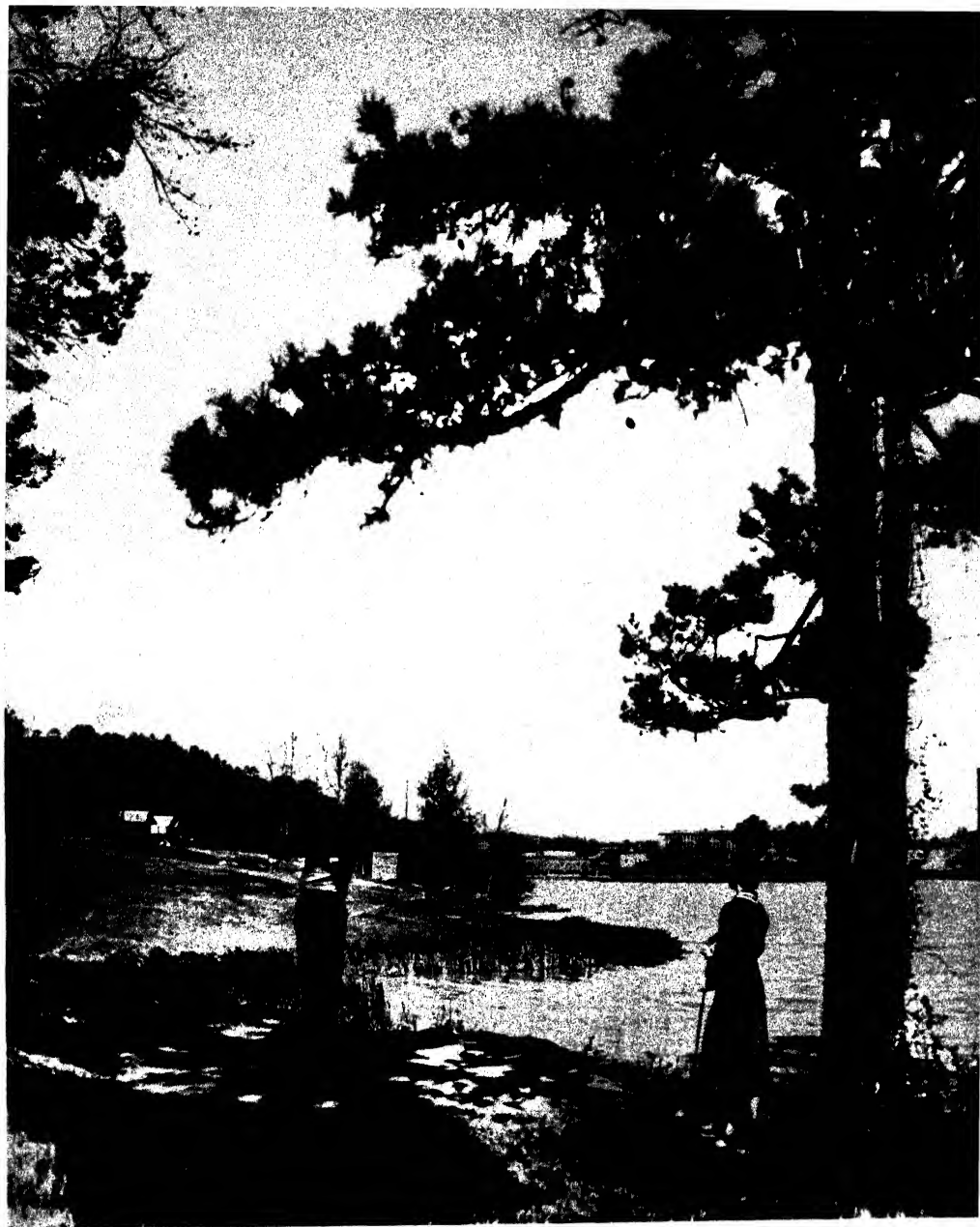


"Touchdown, YAY!"

Belmont's pep-squad is made up of children of mill employees and a daughter of one mill president.



Basket-ball leagues are well established among the Southern combed yarn mills. This shot was taken in the fine new basket-ball gymnasium recently built by one mill for its team and their challengers. Teams are drawn from employees of the mills.



Because Southern combed yarn mills have had a maximum hour work-week of 40 hours since 1933, recreational facilities are tops in this balmy Piedmont climate. One mill in the group has even provided a golf course on which only employees may play.

A trick water-hole shot, and the mill in the background.



Down South, those who don't play baseball watch it. An American Legion Junior Baseball Team, made up almost entirely of boys from cotton mill employee families. More than one Big Leaguer has been drawn from teams such as this one.

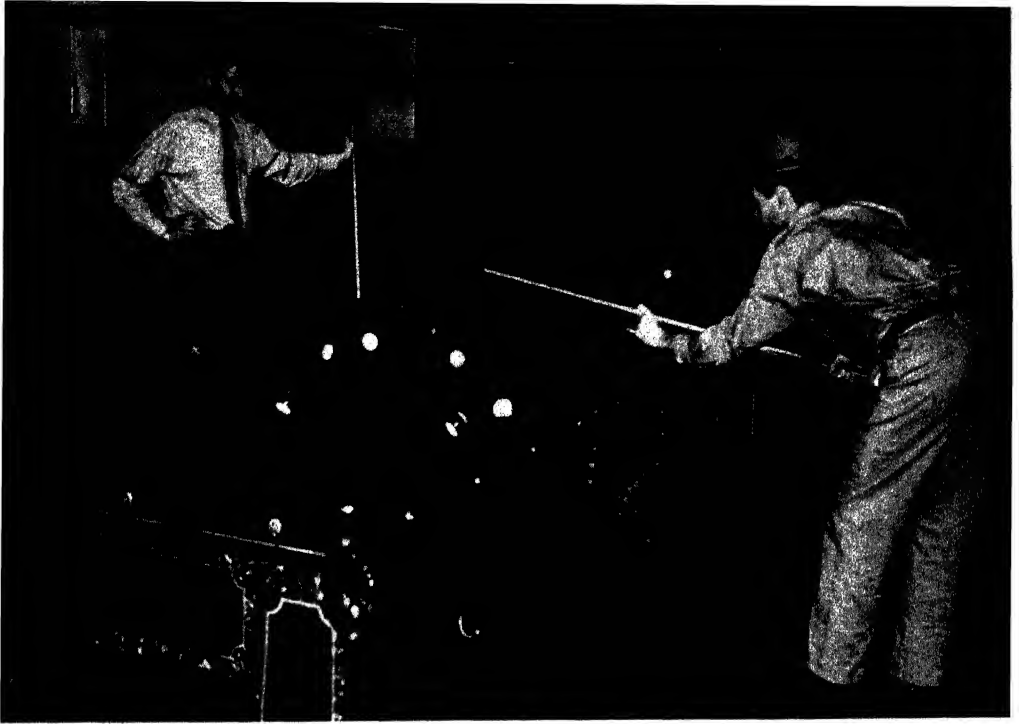


The best trained Boy Scout Troop in Stanley County is made up of boys from textile employee families. The Scout Master himself works in a cardroom. The merit badges speak for themselves.

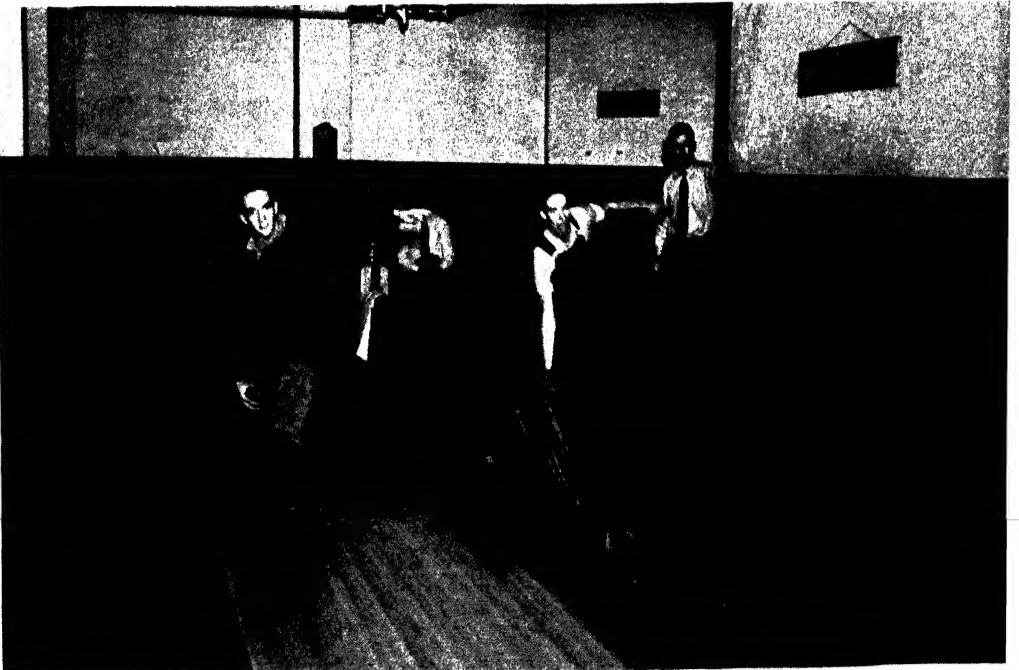


Many combed yarn mill villagers go in for flowers as a hobby. The village in which this man lives is provided with a community hot-house in order that their prize plants may be protected during the winter.





"Who's behind the eight-ball?"



It's either billiards or bowling in this Southern textile mill club-house.

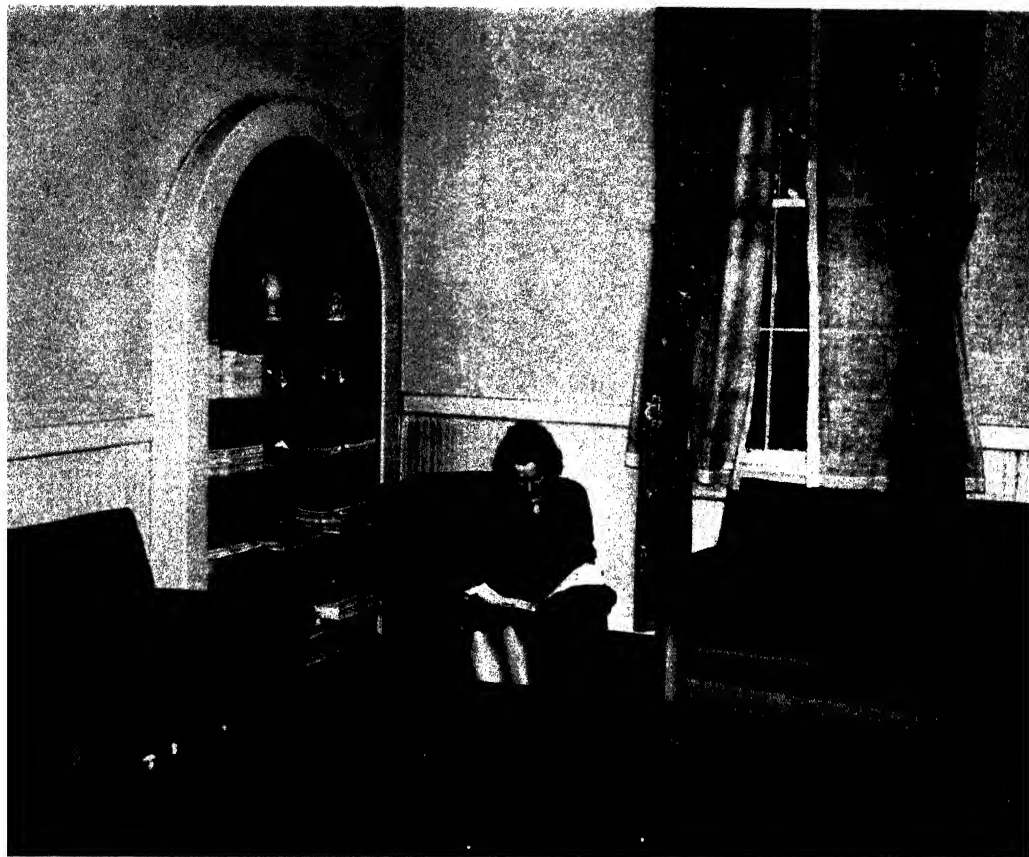


Wine-red vestments are the uniform for this Choral-Club, all members of which are employees of a Gaston County combed yarn mill. The Club is in great demand as an entertainment feature at community gatherings.

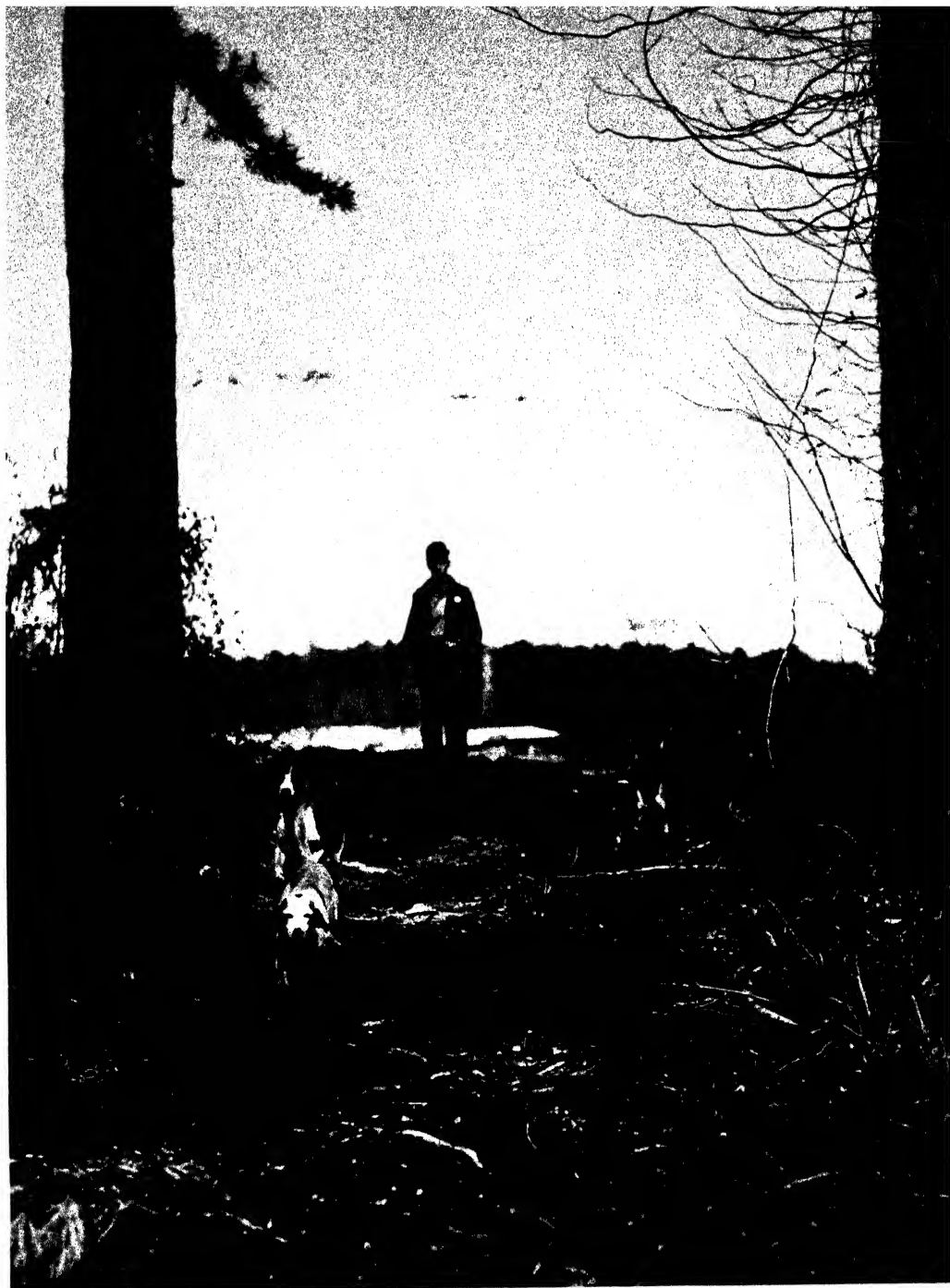


Many young men working in textile plants look forward to more advantageous employment opportunities through attendance at night school. These have just received standard diplomas for a course in vocational education conducted by a Gaston County mill in collaboration with the North Carolina State Board of Vocational Education.

"I joined this class to learn how to become a loom-fixer. With the high wages paid in that job I could save enough to finish my college course. I have already had one year of law and I intend to go back and get my degree," said one of these graduates.



This Girls' Clubroom furnishes restful atmosphere and pleasant surroundings.



Hunting is a major Southern sport in which anyone able to buy a State license may indulge. Rabbit or 'possum hunting, quail or dove shooting . . . Southern mill employees go in for all of them. This young fellow owns a fine pack of beagles.



It's "Squarin' a Set" down in Carolina when the String and Jug Band tune up. One seldom hears of a Square Dance except in the Highlands . . . but to these cotton mill folk, only one or two generations removed from the mountains, it is a regular and favorite Sat'day night frolic.



*"Round up four  
In the middle of the floor."*



*"Meet your partner,  
Pat her on the back.  
If she don't like biscuits  
Feed her flapjack."*



*"Do-ce dough, and a little more  
dough.  
Chicken in the bread pan  
Kickin' out dough."*

*"Break, swing and form a line  
Lady in front and the gent behind'."*





*"All right gents, make your bow;  
And all you ladies, you sho' know how!"*

He works in the card room of a Salisbury combed yarn mill, but he drives sixty miles every Saturday night to call the "figgers" at the Gastonia Square Dance.



Twenty years ago he came to Gastonia as the assistant-pastor of the up-town, socially-bracketed First Presbyterian Church. In less than a year he knew he was needed more in the villages than in the city, and he resigned to devote himself to the spiritual needs of the mill workers. Although in his seventies, it is his habit to frequent the recreation center of his people, lending dignity and his spiritual blessing to the fun. Here he is seen as an onlooker at the Square Dance.



*"Some come to watch,  
Some come to dance.  
Mama's got her hair curled  
But WE'VE got new pants!"*



## Chapter Two

# “FROM BALE TO BOLT”

---

“Well, what in the world is meant by *combed yarn*?” is the question generally thrown at me if the subject is ever brought up. And it generally is, wherever I happen to be. Perhaps it’s at a government committee hearing, perhaps at a cocktail party, perhaps in a group of rocking-chair friends when we’re visiting back home. You know how it goes. . . .

“So you work. . . .”

“How interesting. . . .”

“With combed yarn mills?”

Then that sort of helpless expression creeps over their faces . . . “Well, what in the world is *combed yarn*?”

So I’m off again, desperately floundering . . . “It’s an industry . . . It’s a process . . .” as I struggle to tell, in a few simple words, about the mills which convert raw cotton of longest silkiest staple into fine cotton yarn. That in turn, I tell them, is sold and converted into highest quality knit underwear: shirts and shorts; balbriggans; lisle socks or hose. Or it is woven into the loveliest cotton fabrics and laces, filmy and gossamer, which make a girl’s summer evening frock a dream of beauty; or stronger, sturdier types of cloth which make sports clothes the wearables of the moment, or which may even go into Army uniforms built to withstand the toughest assignments.

“Yarn is the term for cotton which is spun into a thread but not yet converted into a finished product,” I generally say . . . “And combed yarn goes through processes that other cotton yarns don’t, necessitating the use of the very longest staple cotton, generally from the Mississippi Delta. The combing process combs out waste, or short fibres, leaving the longer fibres parallel and giving the yarn a silky and lustrous appearance as well as high tensile strength. Why, combed yarn—in a fine number—has gone through the process of doubling a million and a half times!” Then realizing that the subject is getting a little deep for my listeners I wind up lamely with, “Combed yarn compared to just cotton yarn is sorta like the cream on a bottle of milk.”

And, frustrated, I long with sudden passion to snatch these casual questioners out of their complacency and show them this all-southern industry concentrated in the Piedmont section of the Carolinas . . . an industry representing today no great baronial fortunes, but one which, financed entirely by southern capital, furnishes employment and adequate pay-envelopes to thousands of southern workers.

I long to tell them how the cotton textile industry started in our section through a fluke, a fuel shortage in Greensboro way back in the summer of 1846 which forced the owner of the Mount Hecla Mills there to seek a water-power site on the Catawba River, and how the Lineberger boys, watching the construction of that little mill, pooled their resources of a thousand dollars each (which they had slaved for on washed-out farms) and went to work to build their own cotton mill.

Built it too, by cutting virgin timber, quarrying their own stone, manufacturing their own brick, actually constructing the mill and the dam by which water power was furnished. That first little plant was only 75 by 125 feet, but it had a basement, three stories, and an attic. It was equipped with 600 spindles and complementary machinery, and 50 looms, which had

been freighted by ship, by short rail haul, and by mule team to the isolated spot on the South Fork.

And how the young fellows courtin' and fishin' with bent pins down by the dam site dubbed the little mill Pinhook . . . and as such it is called today when one hears that so-and-so got his start in the textile business "doffin' down at Pinhook."

And when people ask, "How did the combed yarn industry happen to concentrate in the Piedmont section?" or "What have you all got that we don't have that brought so many mills to your part of the country?" I'd like to start at the beginning, and tell how Stowe's Factory was built soon after Pinhook, and by the same tedious processes, and of the courage it took, and how the neighborhood folks worked in the little mills when their cotton crops were laid by.

The cotton from their little farms was spun, and part was made up into "bunch yarn" . . . five pounds to the bunch or hank, and part was spun and then woven into a rough unbleached sheeting on the crude looms. When enough stock was accumulated it was piled in wagons and peddled to the country stores. And farther and farther afield this trade grew . . . over into East Tennessee, down into South Carolina, as far East as the Fall Line of their own state. It was getting up in the world to be a wagoner, a profession which combined business with adventure.

All this opened a new era for farm housewives of long ago who first began streamlined housekeeping when they shoved aside their spinning wheels in favor of this new store-bought yarn which made such elegant things . . . or as they sent their ponderous hand-looms to the barn for storage and cut their husbands' shirts from cloth which they could buy by the yard.

For it is a thrilling story of work and growth in a prostrate land, as after the Civil War and after the coming of the Southern Railroad to the Piedmont, wider markets were opened and the Carolina textile industry mush-

roomed with more and more new mills . . . all financed by home capital as families who watched their neighbors make money in this game pooled their cash and built themselves cotton mills.

Keeping up with the other fellow soon meant installation of more efficient methods of production, they found, and the first development along this line was the lighting by electricity of the McAden Mill, only four years after Edison invented the incandescent lamp! The 16-candle-power lamps gave only a dull reddish glow but the mill, all lighted up, was a marvelous sight in those days. People traveled a hundred miles to see the McAden Mill at night. Picnickers drove in carriages all the way from Charlotte, and after supper on the river bank they waited around to “ooh” and “aahh” when the mill lights flashed on. As a sight-seeing objective in 1883 it rivalled Niagara Falls!

As soon as one mill started an innovation which seemed a trump-card, others followed suit, and if a fellow got one jump ahead of his neighbors, he didn't hold the lead for long. Take the Gray Manufacturing Company, for instance. The first combers installed for continuous operation in the state were placed in that mill in 1905. That was Gaston County's first major attempt in the profitable fine yarn field, and all of Gray's competitors rushed in to sop up some of this tasty gravy as they, too, put combers in their mills. From this time on, when new mills were built in the Piedmont, they had to be “combed yarn.”

The County boomed, the combed yarn industry overflowed the County lines, and grew in neighboring territories, expanding as one finds it today to include towns as far east as Burlington, High Point, Salisbury, and Albemarle . . . up in the mountains to Lenoir and Tuxedo, and over into Tennessee and down into South Carolina, too, for hydro-electric power had come into being and a water-site was no longer necessary.

And those were the days of the bicycle-built-for-two, when ladies wore cotton hose and lots of lace on their corset covers and flouncy petticoats



. . . when children wore long Fay stockings buttoned to their waist bands in front, and when everyone, young and old, male and female, wore long drawers in the wintertime. Combed yarn went into all these things, and combed yarn commanded fancy prices. "Thar wuz gold in them thar mills," then . . .

I'd like to tell how these cautious, practical mill men, the lean, hard years stamped on their faces and the "country" still in their walk, yielded to speculative building during the World War days as mill corporation after mill corporation was hastily organized, only to be caught in a declining market before the last of the blue prints had been transformed into actual plants.

Yes, I'd like to tell all that, and I'd like to tell of the mills as they are today: well lighted, clean, air-conditioned, and of the many interesting processes through which cotton must go to bridge the gap between the nigger, the mule, the cotton-field, and a pretty girl's evening frock swirling on a ballroom floor. I'd like to, but I am always overcome with confusion, and the best I can do when folks ask about combed yarn is to stammer, "Why don't you come to Carolina sometime? I'll take you through a cotton mill and let you see for yourself!"

But if you can't come to the Piedmont, because Jimmy has to go to camp this summer, or Betsey's teeth have to be straightened next winter, or college is in the offing for Junior, you can still see for yourself, for in the following pages the camera takes the mills to you!



The Linberger boys pooled their resources and built their own cotton mill . . . The Woodlawn Cotton Mills ("Old Pinhook") 1846.

After the Civil War cash money was very scarce in the South and script was in general use as a medium of exchange for many years.

This is a facsimile of script used at Woodlawn Cotton Mills. The original bears the date of 1883.

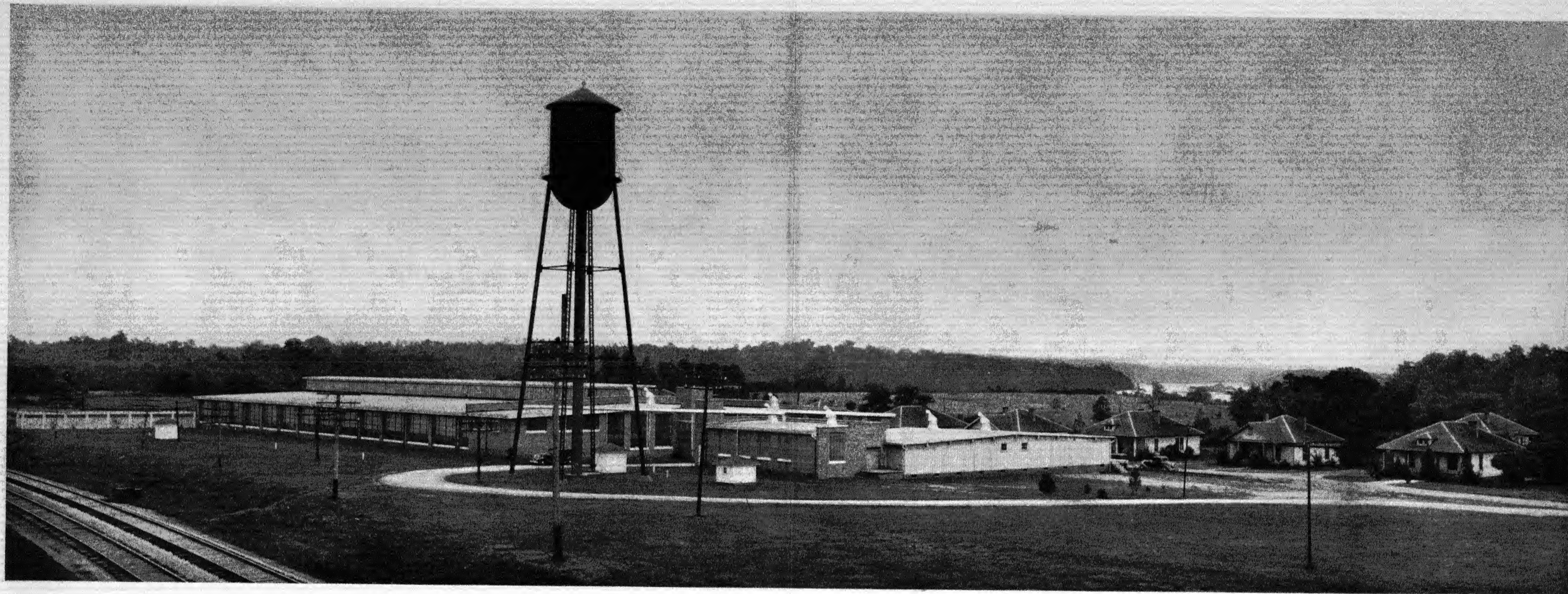




TODAY . . .

Most southern combed yarn plants are located in the country; they are well lighted, airy and clean.





Despite their rural atmosphere, the mills are completely modernized; models of efficiency.



**COTTON STARTS ON ITS WAY THROUGH THE MILL.**

About 50 bales of cotton are opened at a time, and the picker-hands take a portion from each bale . . .

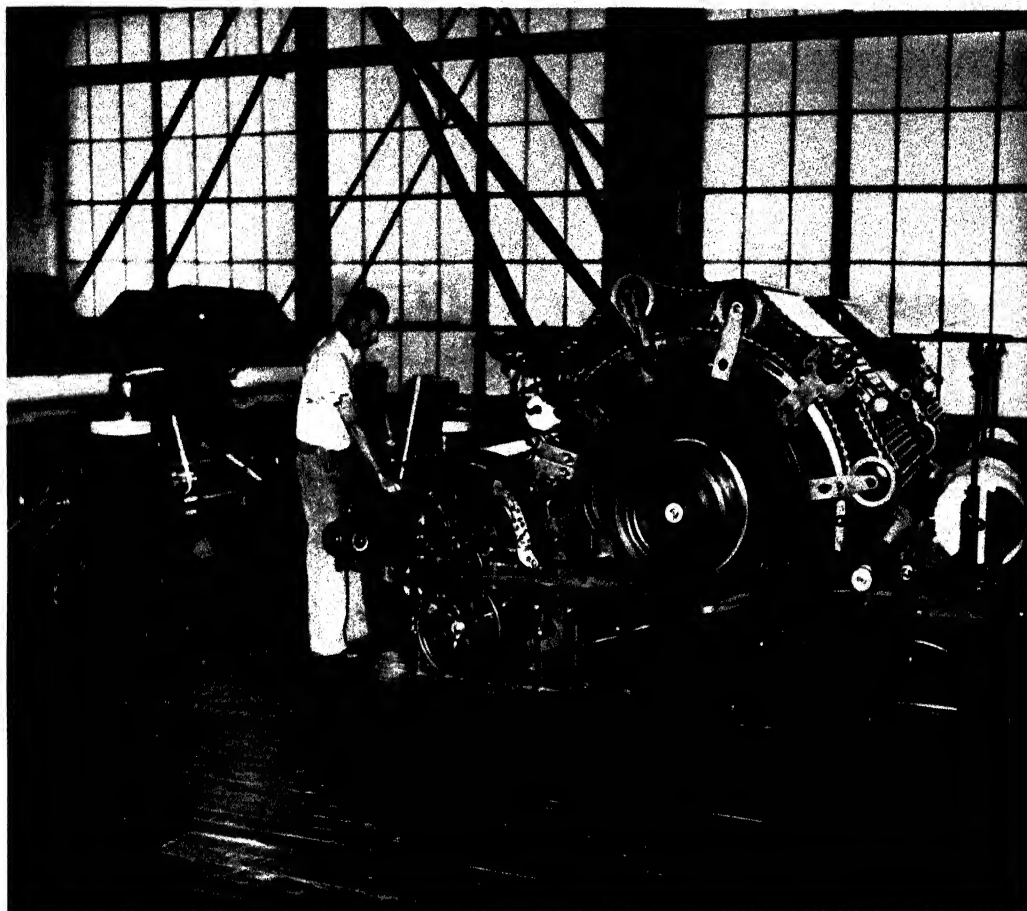


. . . place it in the conveyor which carries it to a vertical opener where a thorough mix is obtained. Cotton is carried from the opener . . .





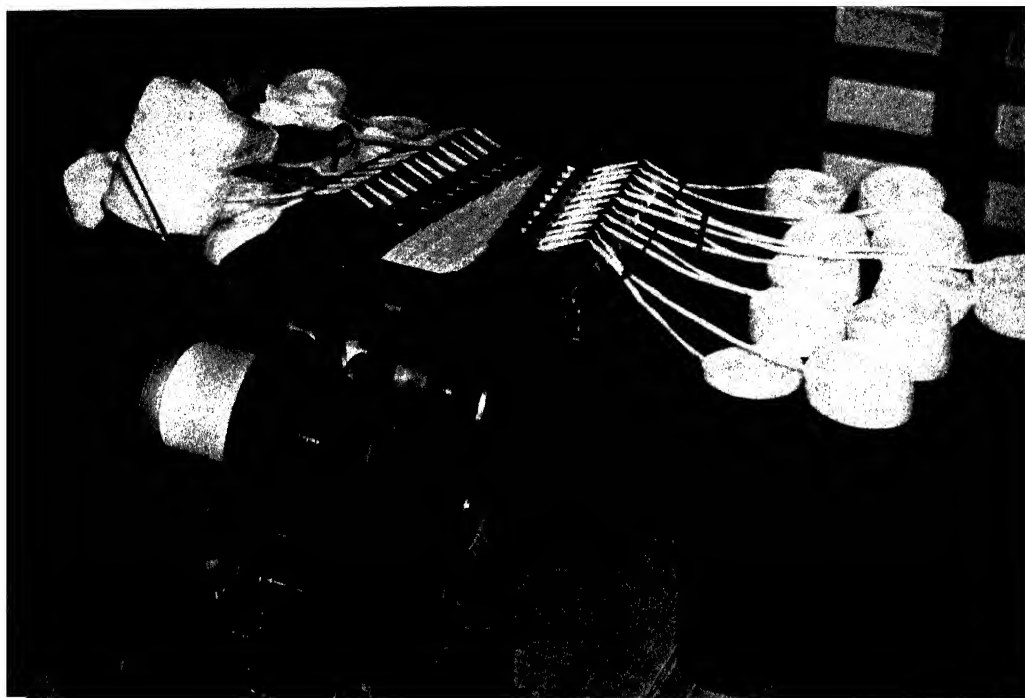
. . . through the Pickers . . . where we see a picker-hand doffing or removing the lap from a Picker. This is the first actual process in the manufacture of cotton. The "lap" or huge roll of cotton which has gone through its first cleaning in the Picker goes from here to the Carding Machine.



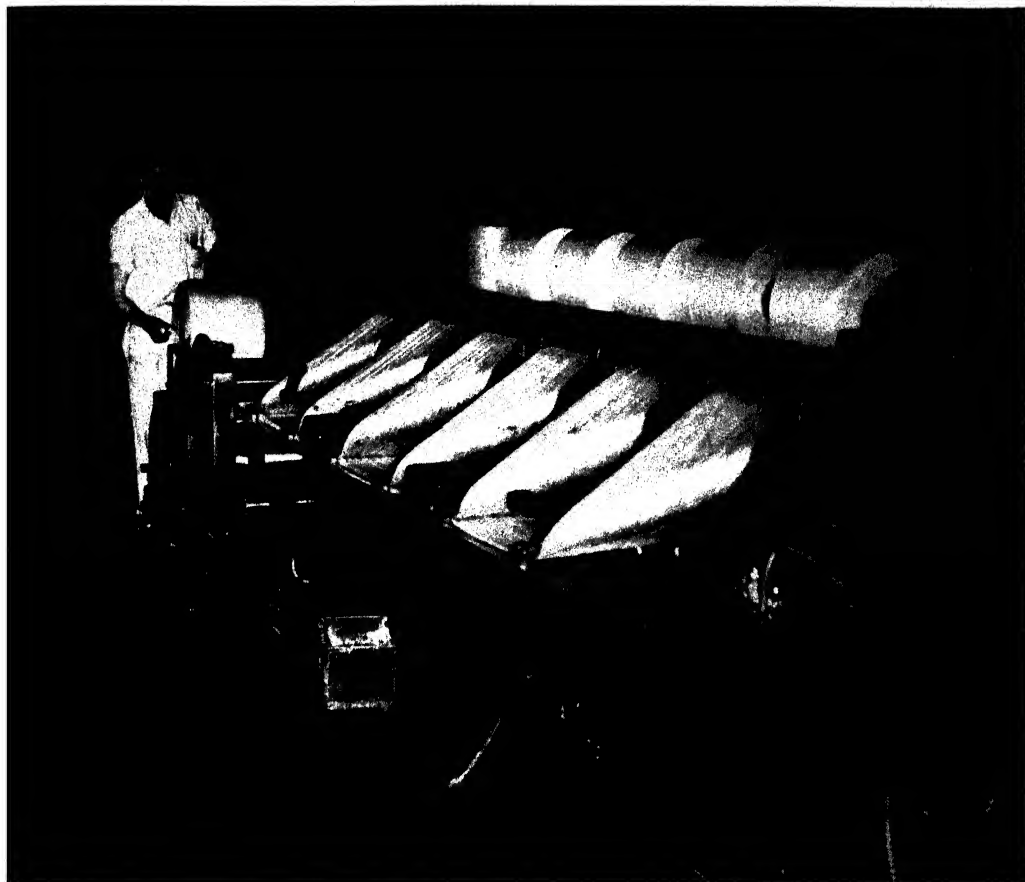
#### CARDING MACHINE.

This is the second operation in the manufacture of cotton. All cotton must be carded: the machine takes out dirt and naps. And its product . . .

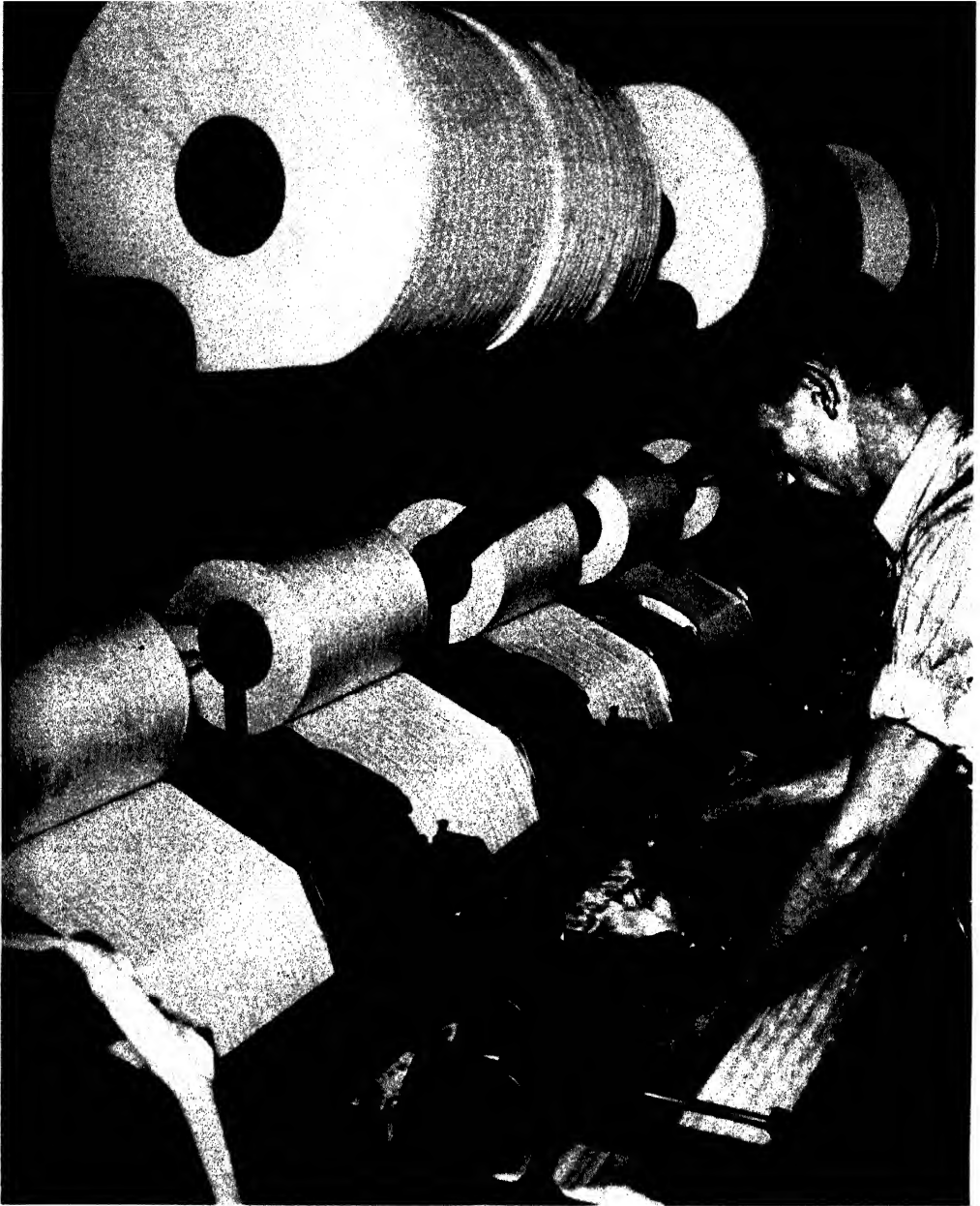




. . . —sliver—is passed on to the Sliver-lap Machine. Here the sliver is “doubled” twenty times, making the ribbon-lap . . .



. . . and the Ribbon-lap Machine in turn condenses six of these ribbon-like bands of cotton into one, preparatory to being combed.



#### THE COMBER.

This is the process which makes combed yarn the high quality product of the cotton textile industry. The Comber, having minute steel teeth, combs out all the short fibres not taken out by the Card. Here the fibres are paralleled and here they again go through the doubling process. For the manufacture of combed yarn, cotton must be of exceptionally long fibre . . . usually  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " staple or longer, and of strict middling grade. Out of every pound of raw cotton manufactured into combed yarn at least one-third is discarded as waste . . . those fibres being too short to survive both carding and combing.



Combed yarn is noted for its high tensile strength, its durability, its lustre, and its smoothness: all brought about through the numerous doublings throughout the process of manufacture. Combed yarn, in a fine number such as 100's, has been doubled 1,500,000 times!

(These pictures show two different types of combers.)



Back of a Drawing Frame, showing six slivers of cotton being condensed into one sliver. The product from this machine goes to Roving Frame where it is made into roving. Roving then goes to the Spinning Frame.



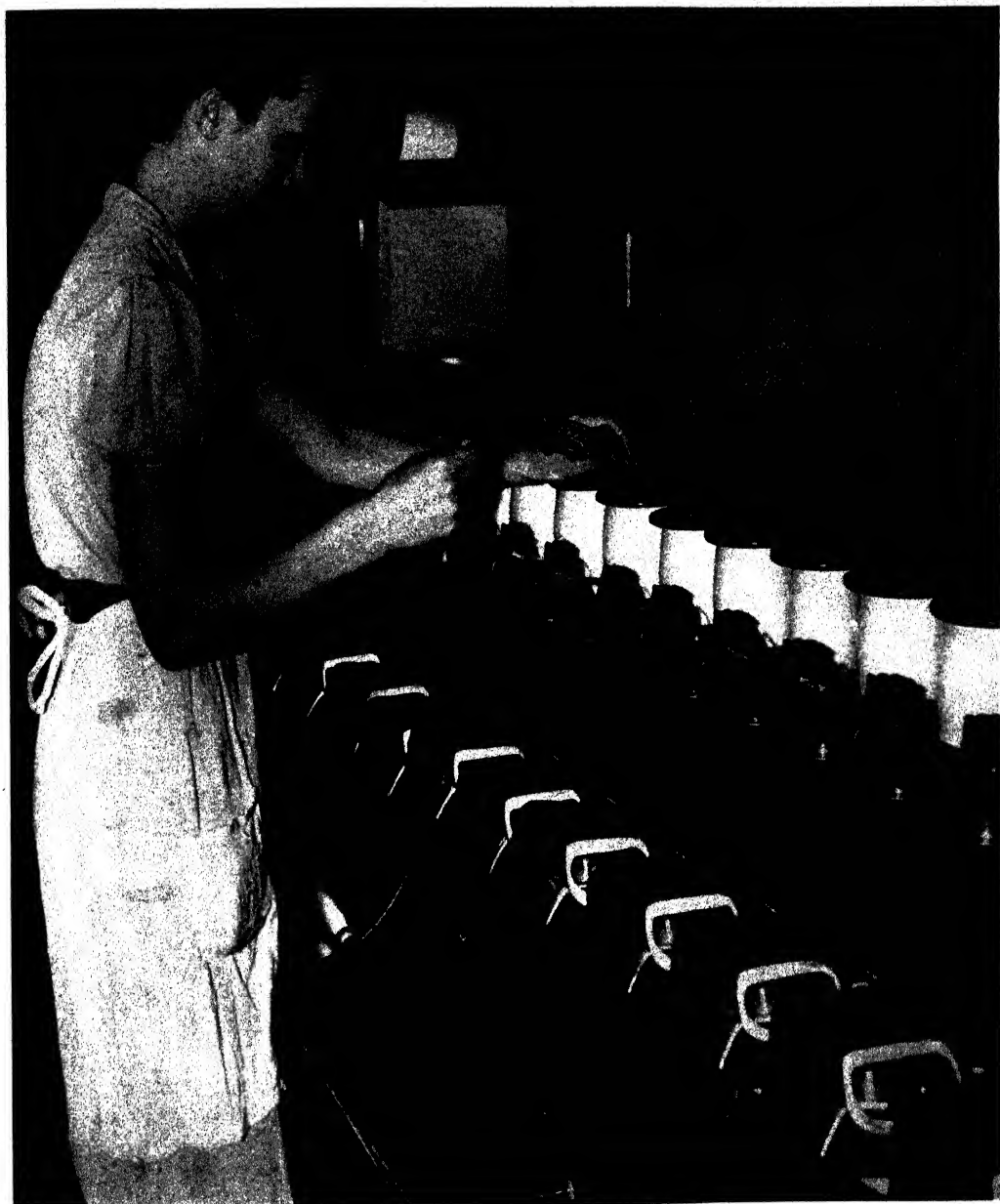
#### SPINNER AND SPINNING FRAMES

showing roving being spun into yarn. Roving is softly twisted cotton on large bobbins. This is long draft spinning, the most modern process.



**DOFFING THE SPINNING FRAME.**

"Doffing" is removing full bobbins from spindles and placing empty bobbins on the spindles to be filled again.



#### SPOOLING.

Running yarn from bobbins to spools to make a larger package and facilitate handling of it. This shows operator using the weaver-knotter, a small but very expensive little gadget which ties broken threads in a split second.

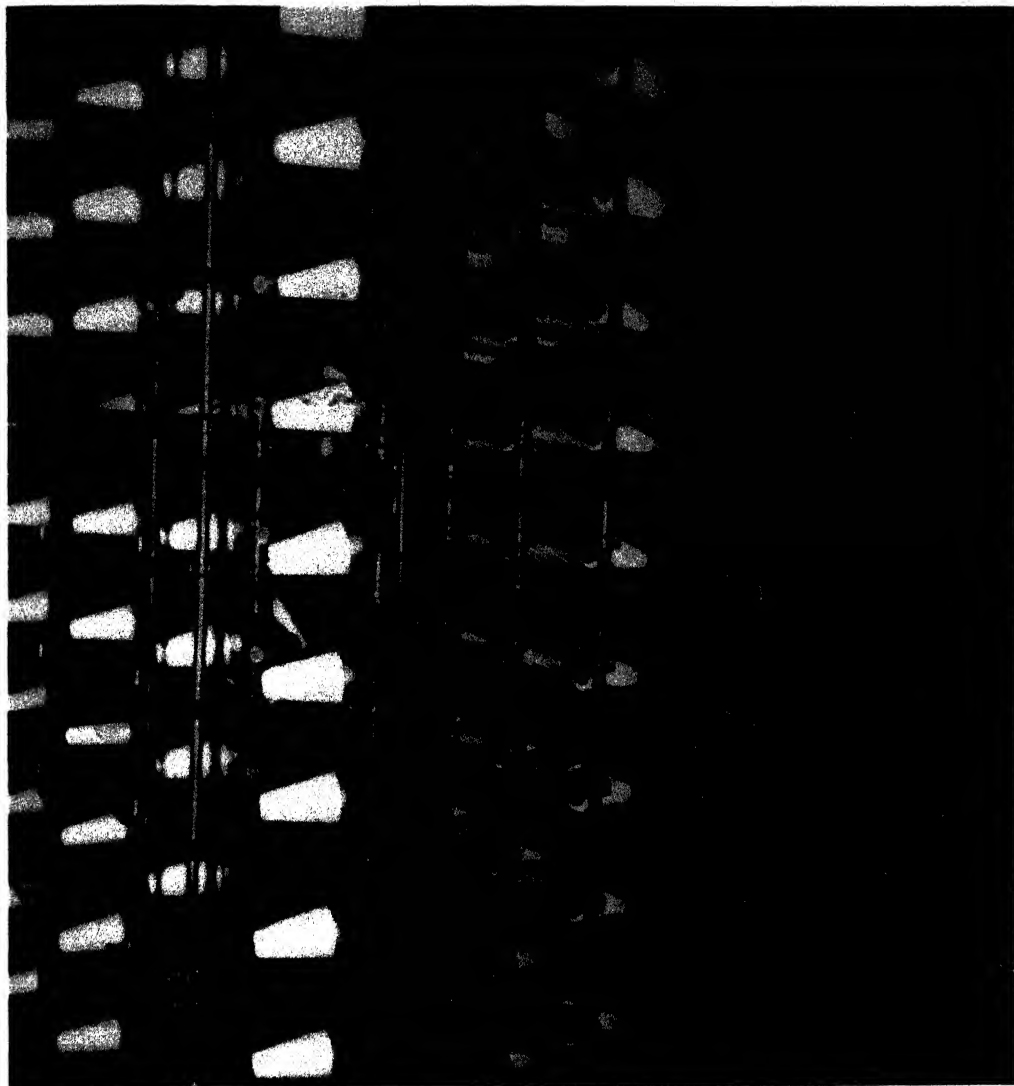




**EVERY COMBED YARN MILL HAS ITS OWN LABORATORY**

in which yarn is tested. These tests are made by weighing small samples of yarn to  $1/70,000$ th of a pound or  $1/10$ th of a grain!

This shows the great care which must be taken in order to keep the "numbers" or sizes of yarn accurate.



#### WARPING

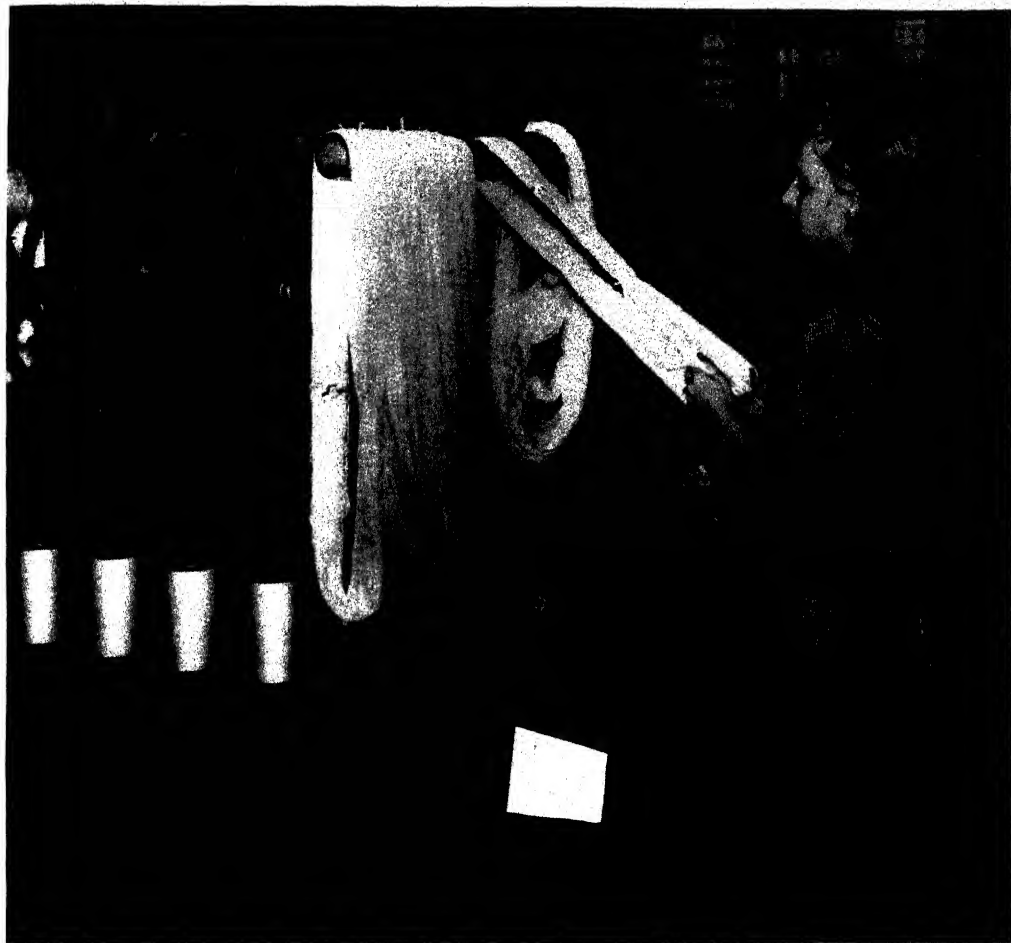
or running the yarn from cones to a Ball-Warper preparatory to mercerizing. This machine is automatic, and if one of these hundreds of threads break, the operation stops instantly.



Nearly fifty years ago a little boy nine years old started to work in a cotton mill as doffer for two young girls in the spinning room.

Today—the third member of the trio owns the modern air-conditioned plant in which the others, these two old darlings, work. All three are proud of their long years of association.

Scene in the reeling room in which yarn is reeled into skeins preparatory to mercerizing.



# INSPECTING

a skein of mercerized yarn preparatory to skein-spooling.



Packing combed yarn, each package of yarn being wrapped separately prior to shipment.



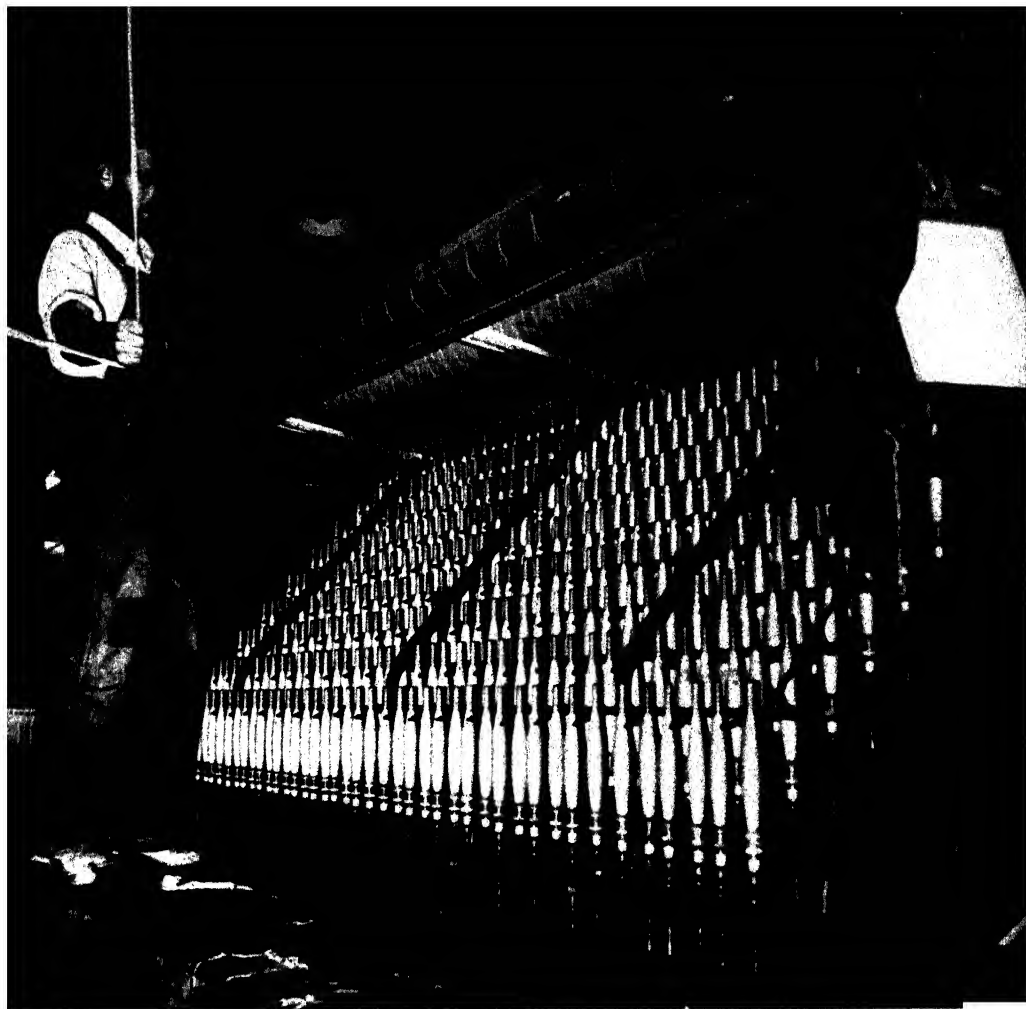
Some combed yarn is made up into knit goods, and some is woven into cloth, while still other combed yarn goes into sewing threads and industrial uses. While the foregoing pictures show the actual spinning processes and carry you through the point where the small packages are being made ready to go to the converter, the following photographs show the weaving processes.

This is the Slashing Machine where yarn is sized preparatory to weaving. Unless yarn is starched before weaving, it would be extremely difficult to handle, as it is so soft it is chafed away by the high speed loom.



#### DRAWING-IN.

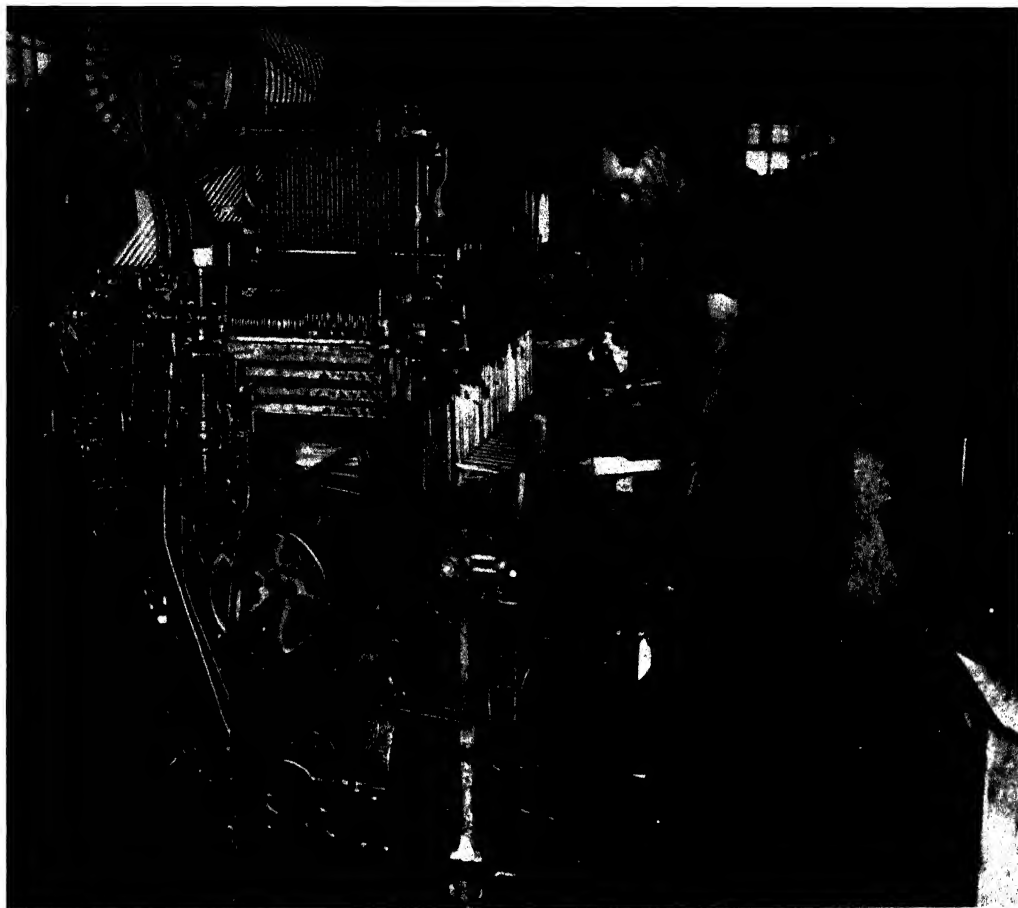
Here the warp threads are drawn into the heddles preparatory to the weaving process. This is one of the most highly skilled operations in a mill as each of 3,000 to 4,000 threads in the warp has to be drawn through exactly the right heddles as well as drop-wires and reeds. The average pay for this job is \$18.00 to \$20.00 per week.



#### A LONG CHAIN QUILLER.

The yarn is run from a ball-warp to quills for filling for weaving. The quill fits into the shuttle which is thrown back and forward through the warp. Preparing the filling . . .





## WEAVING

striped piqué on a dobby loom—four box, 25 harness. The shuttle is thrown back and forth through the warp 162 times per minute!

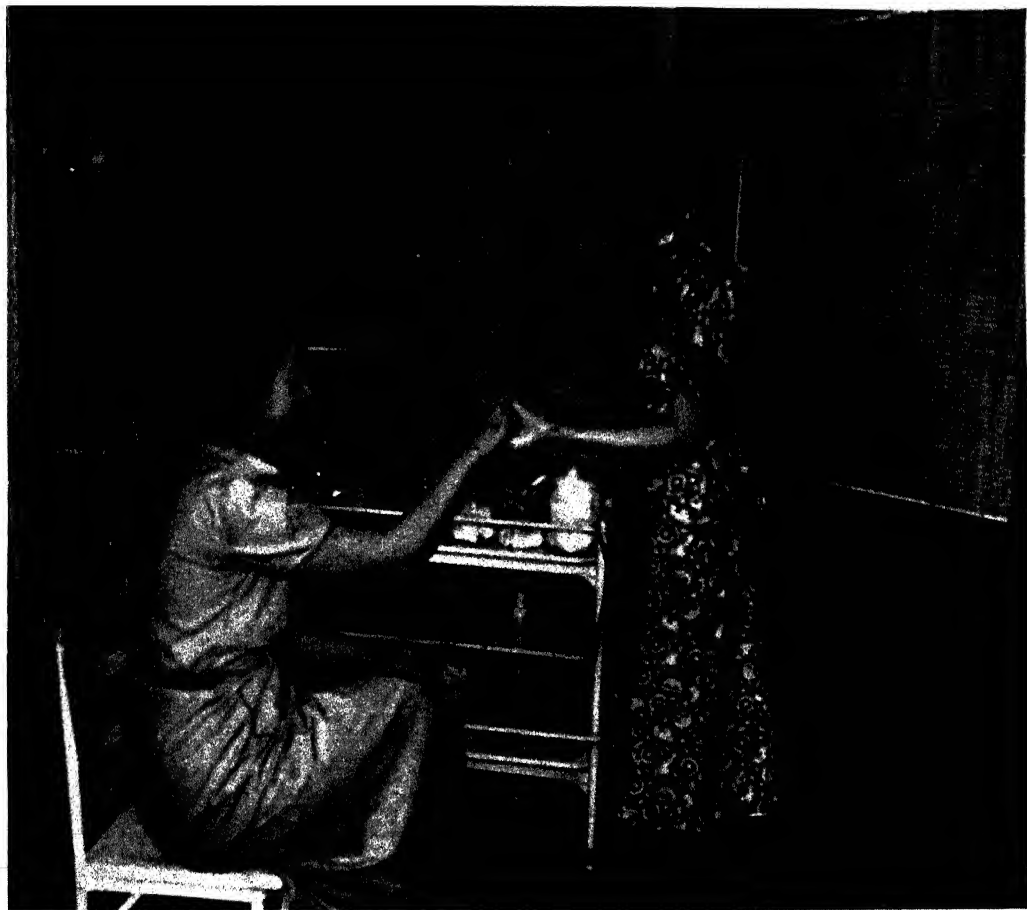


Back of a loom showing warp yarn being fed into loom where it is woven into cloth. Note weaver on the other side of yarn.



#### THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES

is not unusual in combed yarn mills. Portable refreshment stands are wheeled through the mill several times a day in order that operatives may buy cold drinks, sandwiches, candy, etc. Some mills allow milk only to be sold. The mill usually owns its refreshment stand, and profits go toward defraying expenses of the recreational program.



#### SAFETY FIRST!

Although combed yarn mills have a high safety rate . . . one mill in the Southern Combed Yarn group recently having passed a mark of over a million man hours without an accident . . . first aid rooms are provided in order that accidents, no matter how slight, may have immediate attention. Most mills have group accident and health insurance for employees and their dependents.



### *Chapter Three*

## **“MEET THE REESES”**

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It's fun—meeting the Reeses.

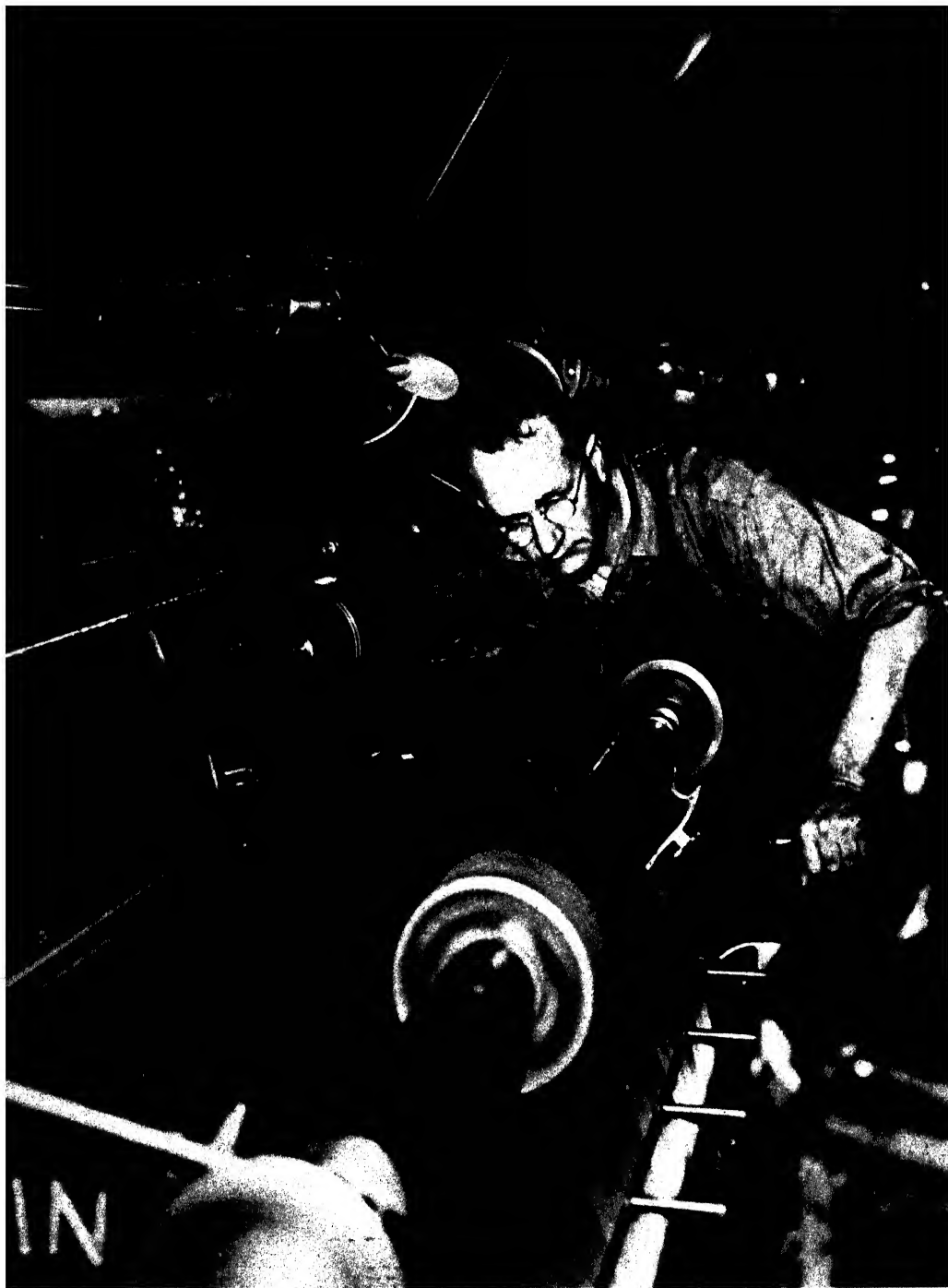
I met them entirely by chance, and found them one of the finest, happiest, most versatile families I have ever known. It happened this way: I wanted an affable family who would allow themselves to be photographed at home, unposed, but in action. Shaking up the names of many such families in a hat I drew out a slip of paper on which was written: “Mr. and Mrs. Ide Reese.”

That was all I knew, their name and address, when I jumped in the car and embarked on this adventure of meeting the Reeses. But before long, I learned that for twenty years they have lived in a certain Southern combed yarn mill village. And there, Mr. Reese has done just what any American man wants to do: keep his job and like it, raise his family and love it.

Mrs. Reese has been on the job, too. Their home, neat and trim, glows with the result of housewife's pride: a handsome crocheted bedspread on the front-room bed, vases of flowers in the living room, a pan of biscuits—deliciously browned—fresh out of the kitchen oven.

Mr. and Mrs. Reese have reared ten children, who—regardless of their age—are rated as good citizens in the community in which they live. Out of the lot, those who are not still in school have their High School diplomas and now, on their own, are making successful lives for themselves. This is the type of family constituting the backbone of America.

Yes sir, knowing these folks is a treat—and so I want *you* to meet the Reeses!



MR. REESE

at his job as card-grinder in a combed yarn mill. The average card-grinder's wage today is \$19.00 per week.



MRS. REESE

in her modern, electrically equipped kitchen, at her job of homemaker.

(Out of 600 houses in this mill village 288 were equipped with electric refrigerators . . . 535 had radios . . . 250 of the 600 families owned automobiles.)





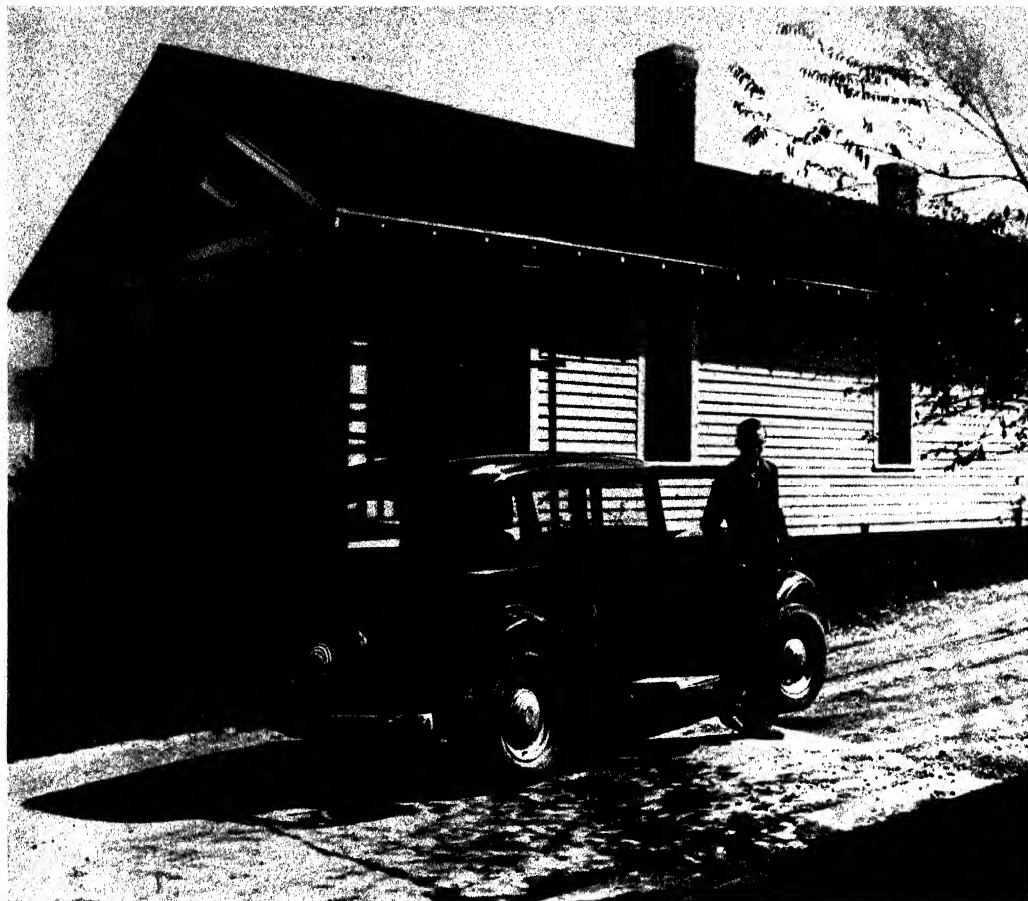
It is early afternoon; Mrs. Reese's home chores are finished and Mr. Reese's shift at the mill is over but the family activities are just beginning . . .

Mr. Reese starts the pruning of his prize-winning specimens of china-berry tree. It won't be long before the sap begins to rise . . .

(For this six room cottage Mr. Reese pays the mill 25¢ per room per week rent. He gets free water and sewage facilities. Electric current is furnished up to 45 K.W.; all above that amount is charged for at a minimum rate.)

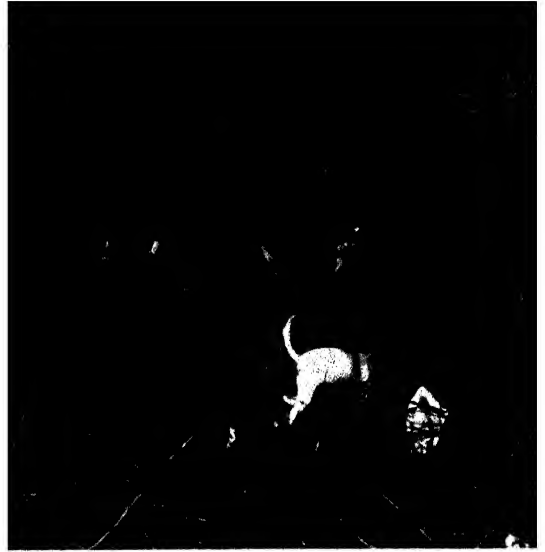


School is out, and Ruth—who won the county-wide high school declamation contest in March, 1939—hurries home to wash the ink off her hands. She is planning a shopping trip, or the movies, perhaps.

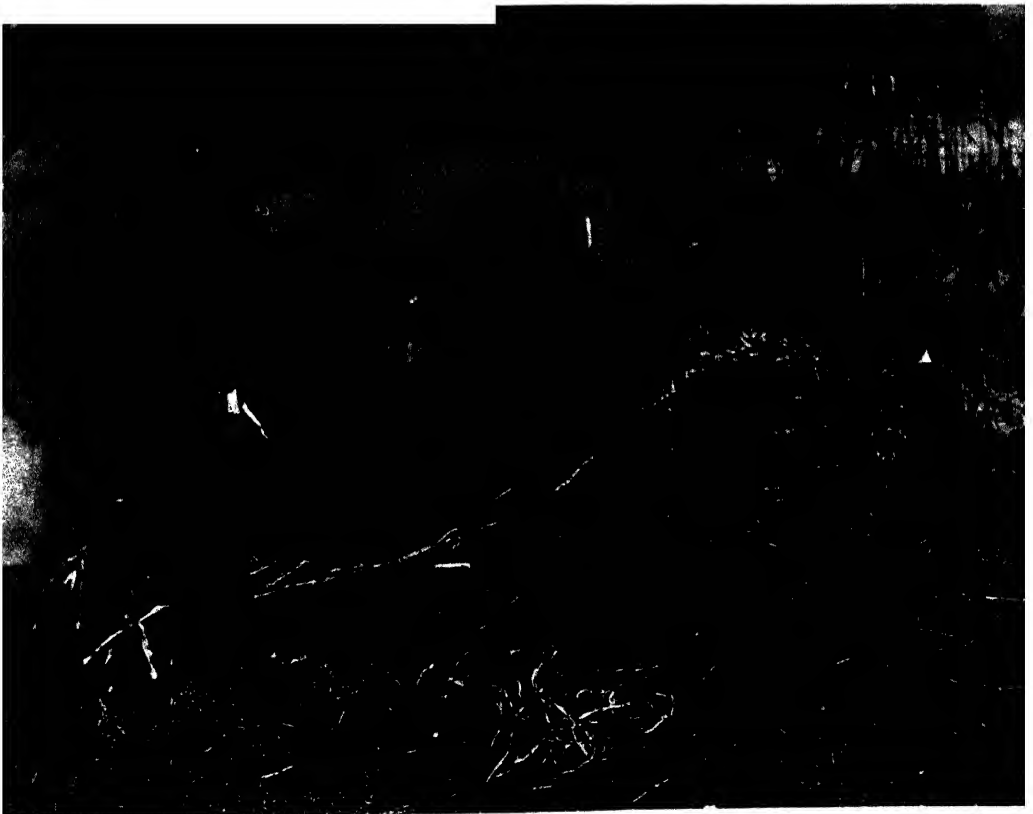


And Boyce Reese, lucky enough to catch a ride home from High School in the family car, gets there just in time. As soon as he changes his clothes he will join his brother Albert, who owns a fine pack of beagles, and go hunting.

Hunting is a major sport in the South and many textile workers are excellent shots. The location of most of the mills in the country makes it possible for anyone able to buy a state hunting-license to hunt quail, rabbit or other game in which the Piedmont abounds.



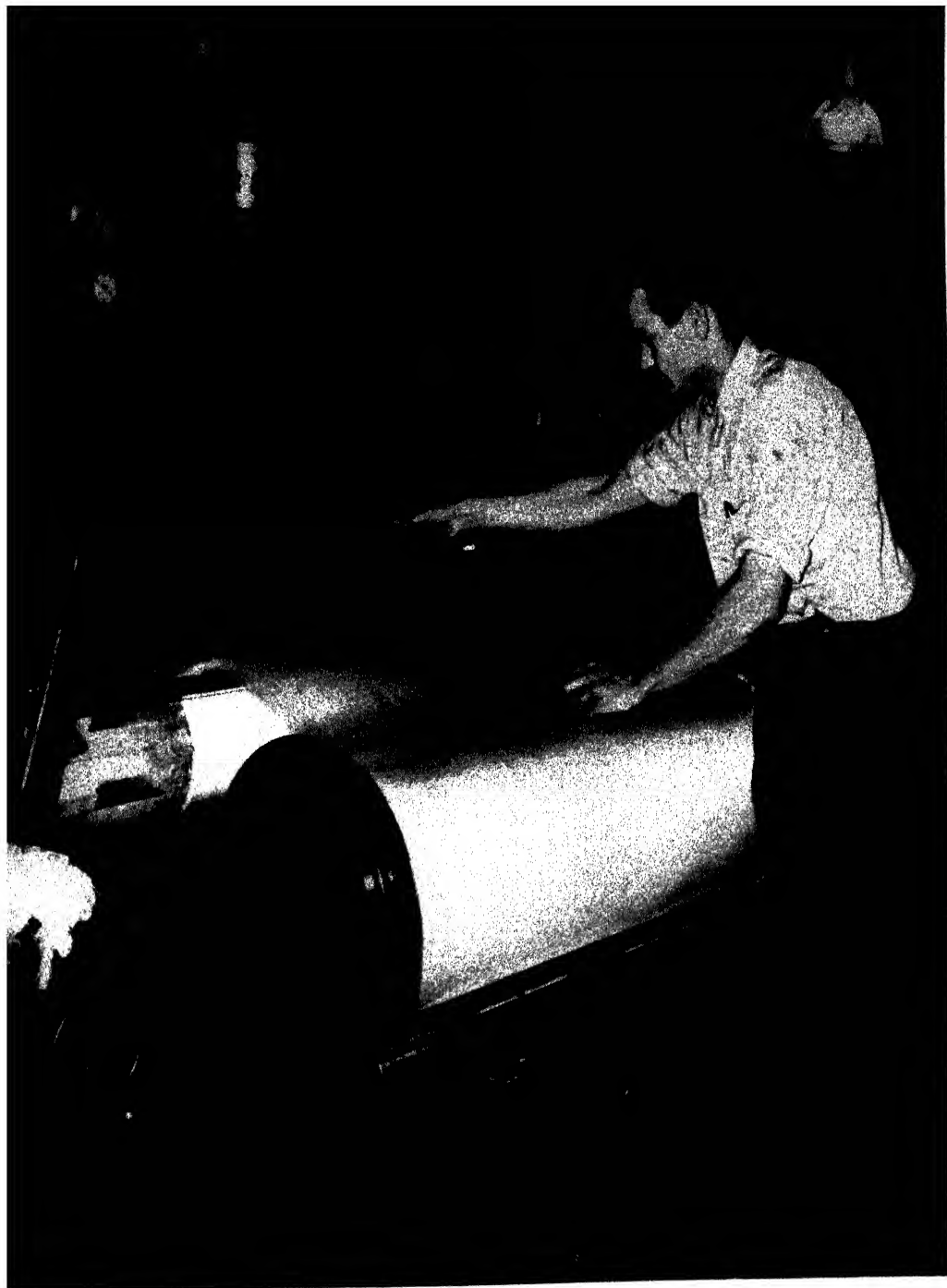
"Bring him out, boys!"



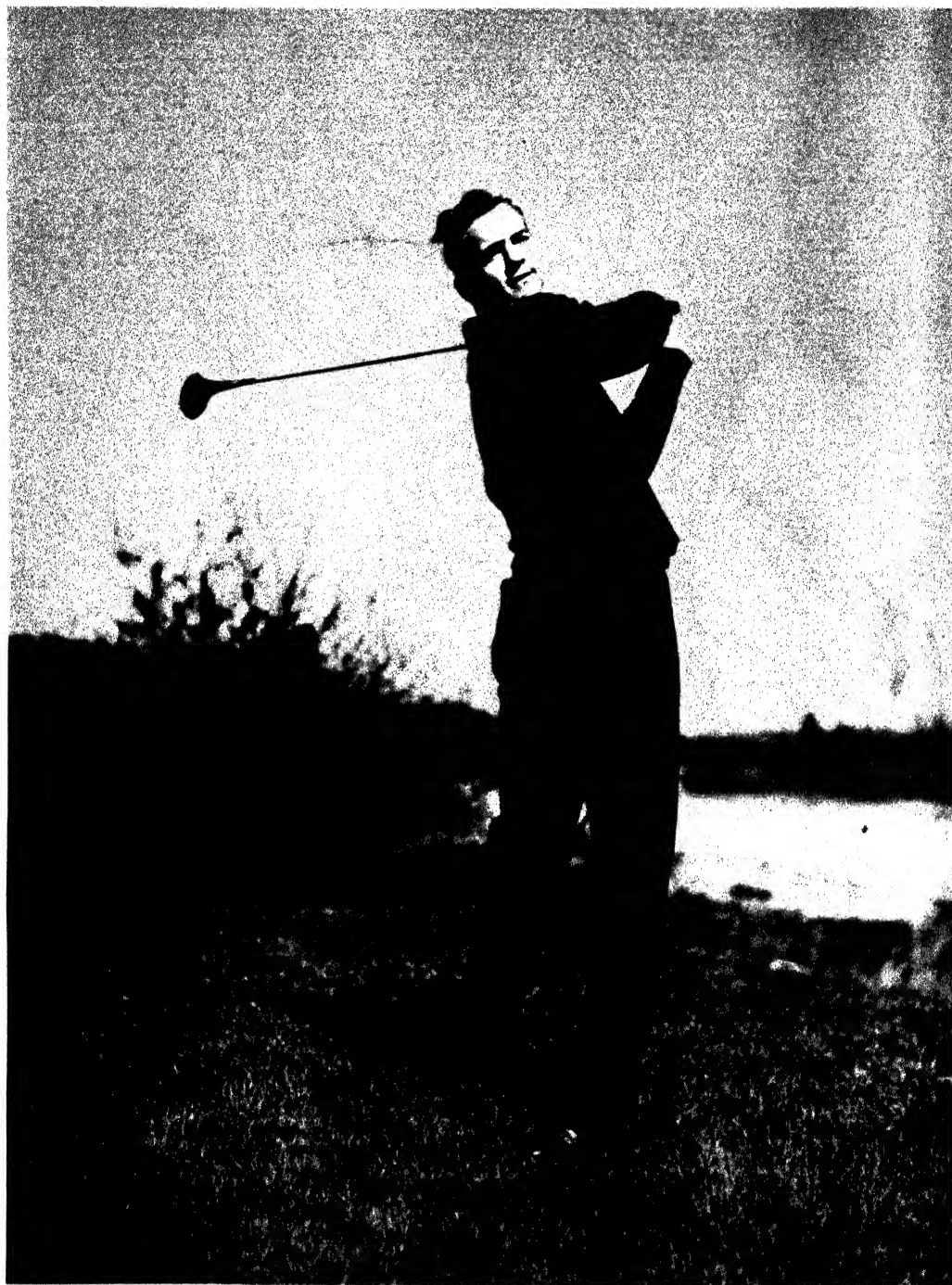
"Seek dead bird . . . seek bird!" . . . Albert Reese out hunting.



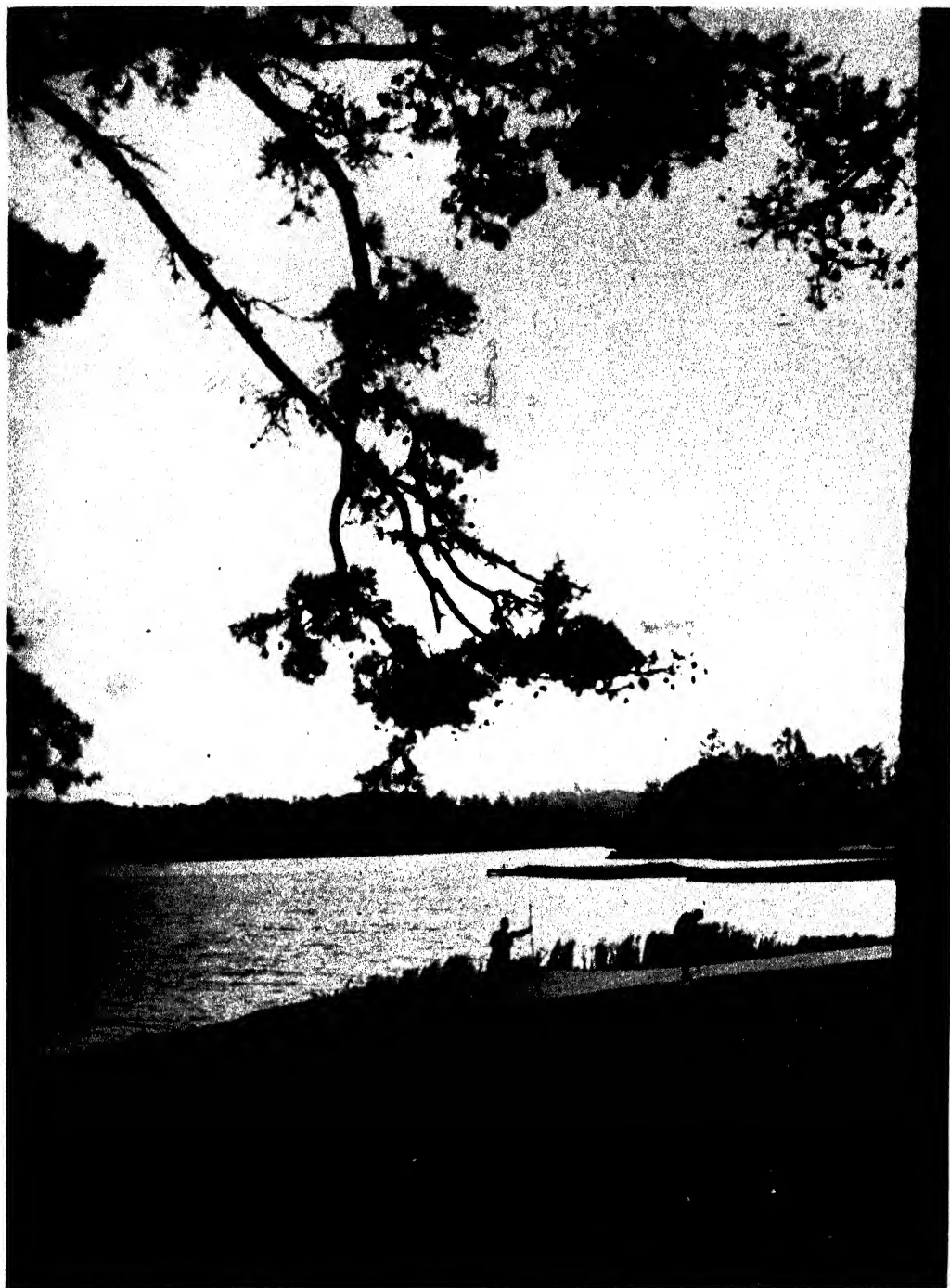
"Sonny, I told you to be careful when riding that bicycle, you might get hurt," Mrs. Reese cautions Ted who has been too venturesome with his new bike.



Although his younger brothers and sisters are of school age still, Leroy Reese is a slasher-tender in the same textile plant in which his father works. The average slasher-tender's wage is \$20.00 per week.

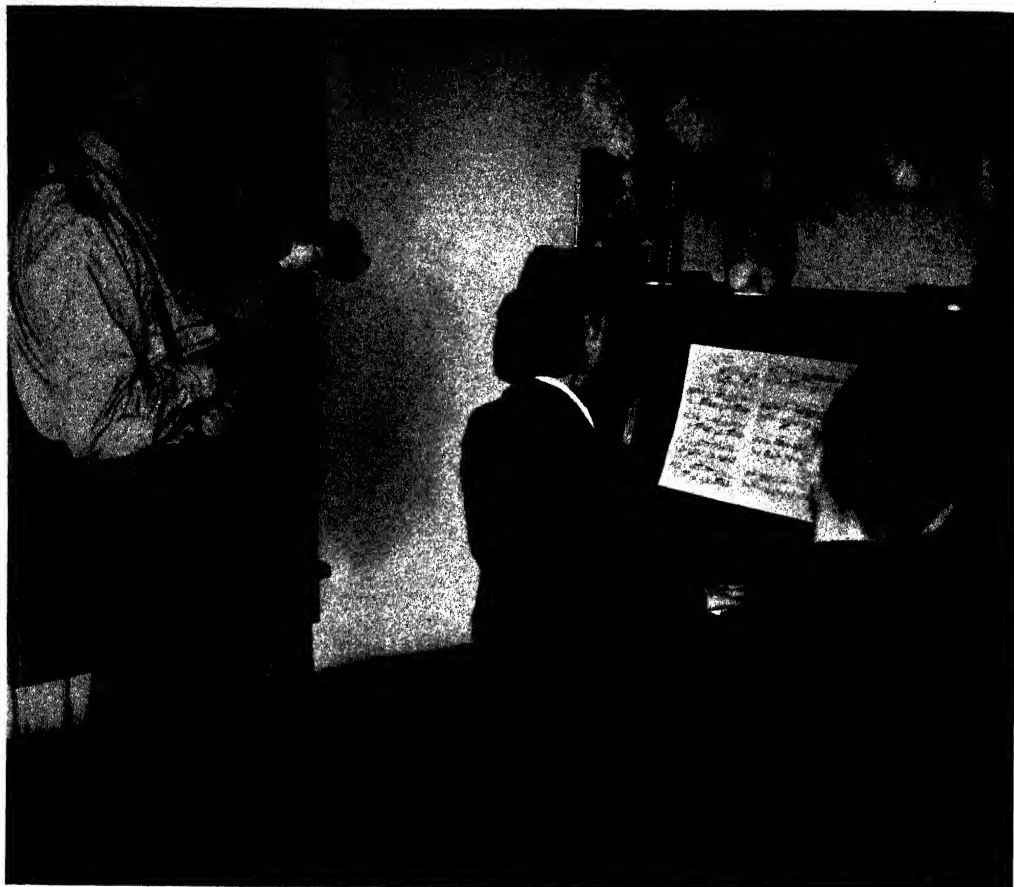


Last year Leroy Reese played in the Southern Golf Association Championship Tournament at Ponte Verde, Florida, and brought home a handsome trophy . . .



. . . He gets almost daily practice for when he leaves his job at three o'clock in the afternoon, he usually plays on this course which is provided by the mill for the use of its employees.

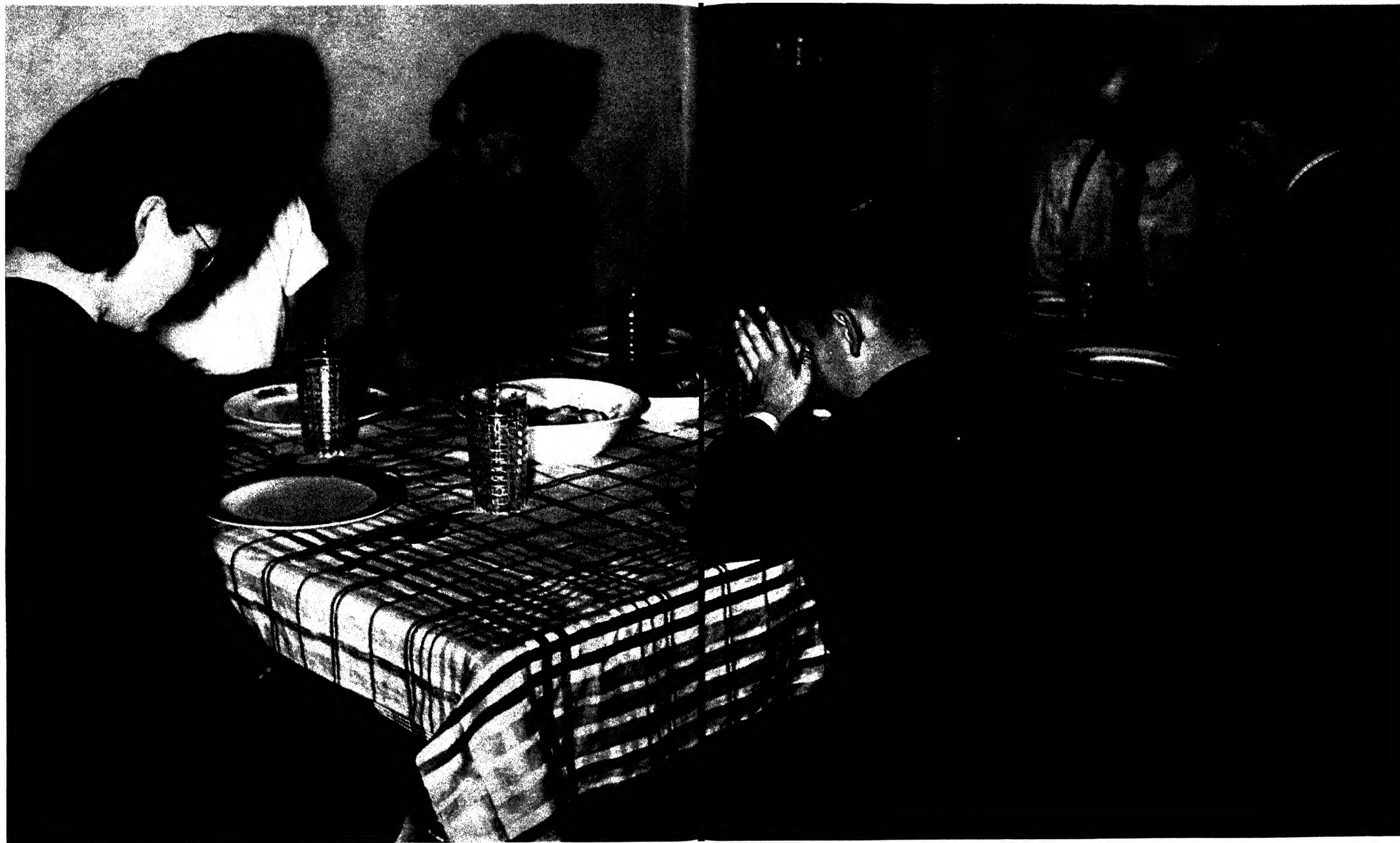




When Mr. Reese gets out his fiddle, he and Ruth strike up a tune. Family musicales are a favorite evening's amusement at the Reese home.



Mr. Reese, like many another father, looks over a school publication with his children.



"Lord, make us thankful for these and all thy blessings . . ."



## *Chapter Four*

# **“COMBED YARN MILL FACTS”**

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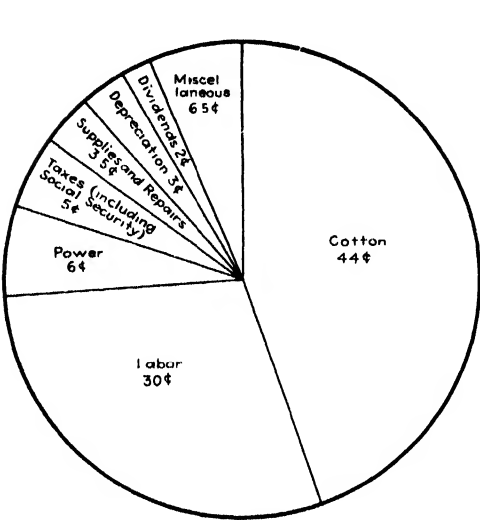
There is a story behind this story and I think you'd like to know it. The Southern combed yarn mills are doing a job they may well be proud of.

Out of the unpretentious beginning of the little Gaston County Manufacturers Association, formed in 1907, has grown the Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, including 97% of the combed yarn manufacturing plants in the South, with assessed property valuations of \$54,584,487.00 and having a total of 1,500,000 producing spindles.

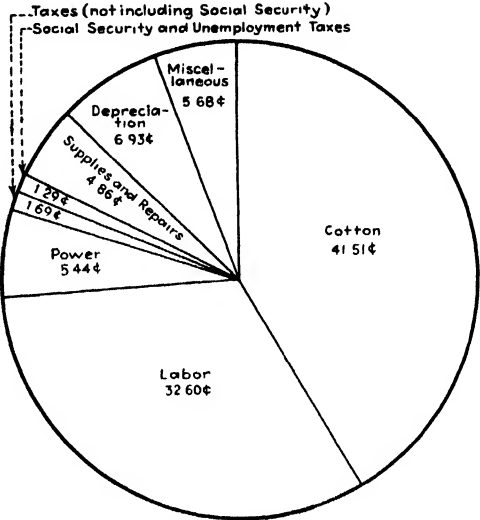
The mills comprising this Association use, annually (on the present basis of production-time—80 hrs. per week maximum or two shifts of 40 hrs. each), 350,000 bales of domestic long staple cotton,  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " and over. Of course, this doesn't look like much compared with government loan figures but it is half the annual United States crop of long staples. The rest is divided up between New England and export business. The cotton consumed by combed yarn mills is necessarily of long staple and averages strict middling grade. It represents an average price during the past three years of 17¢ per pound, for cotton of the staple and quality required for combed yarn goods brings a high premium on any market. In other words, Southern combed yarn mills have had, in that time, a total expenditure of \$75,657,735.00 for raw material alone!

Add to that figure those of machine works, chemical companies, power

companies, which furnish gainful employment because of the needs of the combed yarn group and you get an idea of how far a combed yarn mill dollar goes. Split that dollar up, according to expenditures, and see what happens to it:



**PIE CHART NO. 1**  
Averaged from actual expenditures 1938 of a group of four mills.



**PIE CHART NO. 2**  
Averaged from actual expenditures 1938 of a group of 22 mills

It is of exceptional interest, in these days of mandatory wage regulations, to note the changes in rates of pay in Southern combed yarn mills from 1900 up to the present time . . . and to see the evolution in working time over the same period. These data were compiled after searching many old records as well as up-to-date actual mill pay-rolls, and the results are given from averages obtained from records of a great many combed yarn mills. Because of the available records these figures are based upon North Carolina combed yarn mills, and are given in cents received per hour--the cents being broken down to two decimals:

# WAGE RATE COMPARATIVES IN N. C. COMBED YARN MILLS

Based on Cents per Hour

(The few gaps are from lack of records)

	1900 72 hr. week	1911 60 hr. week	1918 60 hr. week (pay for overtime)	1933* 60 hr. legal week (55 hr. week voluntary program)	1936-1938 40 hr. week (voluntary)
<b>YARD AND SHOP</b>					
Machinist. ....	16 67¢	25 00¢	38.50¢	25.00¢	75.00¢
Night watchman. ....	6 25	8 33	27 50	15 00	36 00
Waste Baler. ....	6 00	8 33	15 00	15 00	25 00
Laborers. ....	6 25	7 50	15 00	15 00	25 00
<b>CARDING</b>					
Overseer. ....	16 67	25 00	35 00	40 00	90 00
Card grinder. ....	12 50	20 83	20 00	23 00	44 00
Fixer. ....	10 40	16 67	20 00	23 00	41 00
Section hand. ....	6 25	7 50	18 00	25 00	44 00
Card hands. ....	6 25	7 50	16 00	18 00	32 50
Sweeper. ....	5 00	6 25	15 00	15 00	32 50
Lap machine hand. ....		7 50	27 50	16 00	40 00
Comber hand. ....		7 50	30 00	15 00	40 00
Oiler. ....	6 25	10 00	26 00	15 00	36 00
Cotton opener. ....			26 50	10 00	25 00
Helpers. ....				15 00	
Scrubber. ....	6 25	7 50		20 00	25 00
Picker. ....	6 25	8 33	17 50	20 00	32 50
Roving hauler. ....			21 50	20 00	32 50
Drawing. ....	6 00	6 67	26 00	25 00	40 00
Slubber. ....	6 25	7 50	40 00	25 00	40 00
1st Intermediate. ....	6 25	8 00	18 00	25 00	40 00
2nd Intermediate. ....	6 25	8 00	18 00	25 00	40 00
Speeder hand. ....			18 00	25 00	40 00
<b>SPINNING</b>					
Overseer. ....	16 67	20 00	35 00	41 00	90 00
Section men. ....	7 50	12 00	20 00	28 00	44 00
Roving hand. ....	6 25	7 50	15 00	15 00	32 50
Oiler bander. ....	6 25	9 00	30 00	14 00	36 00
Sweeper. ....	5 00	6 25	15 00	15 00	32 50
Doffer. ....	2 50	4 00	15 00	14 00	32 50
Band maker. ....	2 50	4 00	26 00	14 00	31 00
Scrubber. ....	6 25	7 50	15 00	15 00	25 00
Spinner. ....	6 25	7 50	19 00	25 00	33 75
<b>TWISTING</b>					
Section man. ....	7 50	10 00	33 00	23 00	44 00
Oiler bander. ....	7 50	10 00	33 00	15 00	36 00
Yarn man. ....	6 25	7 50	16 00	17 00	32 50
Twisters. ....	6 25	7 50	20 00	20 00	40 00
Doffers. ....	2 50	5 00	15 00	15 00	32 50
Reeling hands. ....	6 25	7 50	15 00	15 00	40 00
Creeler. ....	7 50	10 00	15 00	16 00	32 50
Overhauler. ....				25 00	45 00
Oiler. ....			26 00	15 00	36 00
<b>WARP AND WINDING</b>					
Section man. ....	7 50	10 00	39 50	30 00	44 00
Packer. ....	6 25	8 33	20 00	17 00	35 00
Warper. ....	8 33	12 00	18 00	20 00	34 00
Winder. ....	6 25	8 33	30 00	13 00	42 50

\*Before NRA

Labor legislation in this section of the South is an old story. A Bureau of Labor Statistics was established by North Carolina as far back as 1887 . . . and the first child labor law in the state was passed in 1903. Other legislative acts, regulating hours of employment in manufacturing plants and providing for compulsory education, followed at almost every session of the General Assembly, as is seen by the following brief outline:

*Legislation Affecting Textile Labor in North Carolina*

- 1903** 12 year age limit and 66 hours for children under 18.
- 1907** 12 year age limit; children 12 to 13 allowed employment in apprenticeship capacity after having attended school four months out of preceding twelve. 66 hour week for all persons. No child under 14 should work between 8 P. M. and 5 A. M.
- 1911** Hour limitation of 60 per week for all employees.
- 1913** 13 year age limit and apprenticeship provision (1907) retained; no person under 16 should work in a mill between 9 P. M. and 6. A. M. Required use of a system of employment certificates issued by school authorities, if possible—based on documentary proof of age; duty of enforcing school provisions placed on county school superintendents; children between ages of 8 and 12 should attend school four months during each year, with exemptions allowed, if necessary for children to work for parents' support.
- 1915** A 60 hour week; no employment of women and minors for more than 11 hours a day or 60 a week, and overtime pay for men who worked longer. Written statement required as to age and school attendance of children hired to mills.
- 1919** Compulsory education and regulation of child labor. Children ages 8 to 14 should attend school for entire term, with exemption only in some cases of distance, poverty, mental, or physical deficiency. No employment of children under 14; children under 16 should not be



employed between 9 P. M. and 6 A. M. A State Child Welfare Commission set up to enforce child labor laws. Exemptions: boys over 12 could work during vacations.

- 1924** Removal of Exceptions clause allowing boys under 14 to work in mills during vacations. Adoption of provisions preventing employment of children under 16 physically unfit or in hazardous occupation.
- 1927** No child under 16 should be employed more than 8 hours a day or 48 hours a week six days a week or between 7 P. M. and 6 A. M. Children over 14 allowed to work between 6 A. M. and 7 P. M. provided they had completed fourth grade in school.
- 1931** Voluntary elimination of night work for women and minors by majority of all cotton textile mills (88%) and voluntary adoption of 55 hour week by majority of mills throughout entire cotton textile industry.\*
- 1931** 14 year limit in factories; children under 16 restricted to 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, or 6 days a week except boys who were sole support of themselves or widowed mothers. Minors under 16 were not allowed to work between 6 P. M. and 7 A. M.; those 16 to 18 not over 48 hours a week or between 12 midnight and 6 A. M.; no girl between 16 and 18 could work between 9 P. M. to 6 A. M. Provision of well defined system of certification.
- 1933** N.R.A. 40 hours a week; 16 year age limit; minimum rate of pay; repealed in 1935. (Federal)
- 1937** General age limit for gainful employment 16; Minors 16 to 18 should not work more than 48 hours a week, 9 hours a day, or more than 6 days a week, or from midnight to 6 A. M. No girls under 18 permitted to work in factories at night. Provision for employment certificates; inspection of all types of industries; and enforcement of law were included.

\* This agreement met with 100% approval by Southern combed yarn mills.

## **1938 Wage and Hour Bill—(Federal)**

Southern combed yarn mill executives have had their part in each of these developments, for in this group is found representative types of fine industrial leadership.

After years of study of economic conditions and industrial relations existing in the Southern combed yarn mills I come to the simple, net conclusion:

There are no mill barons in the Southern Combed Yarn Spinners group. There has been no sizable financial return for stockholders in over ten years. But in the mill villages evidence of well-being and contentment is reflected in the faces we see.

## *Member Mills*

### **SOUTHERN COMBED YARN SPINNERS ASSOCIATION**

Acme Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.	Mauney Mills, Inc., Kings Mountain, N. C.
American Yarn & Processing Co., Mount Holly, N. C.	Mebane Yarn Mills, Inc., Mebane, N. C.
Bowling Green Spinning Co., Gastonia, N. C.	Melville Mills, Inc., Lincolnton, N. C.
Carlton Yarn Mills, Inc., Cherryville, N. C.	Monroe Mills Co., Monroe, N. C.
China Grove Cotton Mills, Co., China Grove, N. C.	National Yarn Mills, Inc., Belmont, N. C.
Chronicle Mills, Belmont, N. C.	Nelson Cotton Mills Co., Lenoir, N. C.
Climax Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.	Nuway Spinning Co., Inc., Cherryville, N. C.
Cramerton Mills, Inc., Cramerton, N. C.	Oakboro Cotton Mills Co., Oakboro, N. C.
Crescent Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.	Park Yarn Mills Co., Kings Mountain, N. C.
Dixon Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.	Parkdale Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.
Eagle Yarn Mills, Inc., Belmont, N. C.	Peerless Spinning Corp., Lowell, N. C.
Efird Manufacturing Co., Albemarle, N. C.	Perfection Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.
Falls Manufacturing Co., Granite Falls, N. C.	Ragan Spinning Co., Gastonia, N. C.
Flint Manufacturing Co., Gastonia, N. C.	Ridge Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.
Gastonia Combed Yarn Corp., Gastonia, N. C.	Robinson Yarn Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.
Globe Mills Co., Mount Holly, N. C.	Rowan Cotton Mills Co., Salisbury, N. C.
Green River Mills, Inc., Tuxedo, N. C.	Ruby Cotton Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.
Groves Thread Co., Gastonia, N. C.	A. M. Smyre Mfg. Co., Gastonia, N. C.
Hall-Kale Manufacturing Co., Troutman, N. C.	South Fork Mfg. Co., Belmont, N. C.
Hampton Spinning Mills, Clover, S. C.	Sterling Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.
Hanover Mills, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.	Standard-Coosa-Thatcher Co., Chattanooga, Tenn.
Imperial Yarn Mills, Inc., Belmont, N. C.	Stowe Spinning Co., Belmont, N. C.
Insulating Yarns, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.	Stowe Thread Co., Belmont, N. C.
Johnston Manufacturing Co., Charlotte, N. C.	Superior Yarn Mills, Inc., Statesville, N. C.
Linford Mills, Inc., Belmont, N. C.	Textiles, Inc., Gastonia, N. C.
Lola Mills, Inc., Stanley, N. C.	Trenton Cotton Mills, Gastonia, N. C.
Majestic Manufacturing Co., Belmont, N. C.	Union Mills Co., Monroe, N. C.
	United Spinners Corp., Lowell, N. C.
	Wiscassett Mills Co., Albemarle, N. C.
	Worth Spinning Co., Stony Point, N. C.

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